Date A Live Volume 4

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These are novel illustrations that were included in **Volume 4 - Itsuka Sister**

Sister ITSUKA

SpiritNo.5
AstralDress-EfreetType　Weapon-HalberdType[Camael]

DATE デート・ア・ライブ 04

五河シスター

橘公司
The author
Koushi Tachibana

ファンタジア文庫

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●たちばなこうし

東京都在住。第20回ファンタジア長編小説大賞準入選作『蒼穹のカルマ』でデビュー。基本的に自作のキャラクターはみんな好きですが、一番筆が乗るのは折紙だったりします。ただし、一番シーンがカットされやすいのも間違いなく折紙です。×××とか×××とか集めてたら駄目みたいです。ベッドの枕元に×××とか置いてたら駄目みたいです。

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五河シスター

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デート・ア・ライブ4
五河シスター

最悪の精霊、狂三を救ってみせると、そして真那も救ってみせると、言いながら結局、士道は何もできなかった。

もし、あのとき五河琴里が現れなければ全ては終わっていた。

「今から五年前。――私は精霊になった。士道の回復能力はもともと私の力よ」

琴里の口から告げられる真実。彼女が精霊になり。士道が初めて精霊を封印し。折紙の両親が精霊に殺された五年前の事件。

「今日で私は私でなくなる。その前に、おにーちゃんとのデートを」

タイムリミットはたった一日。可愛い妹で、苛烈で強気な司令官を救うため、デートして、デレさせろ!?

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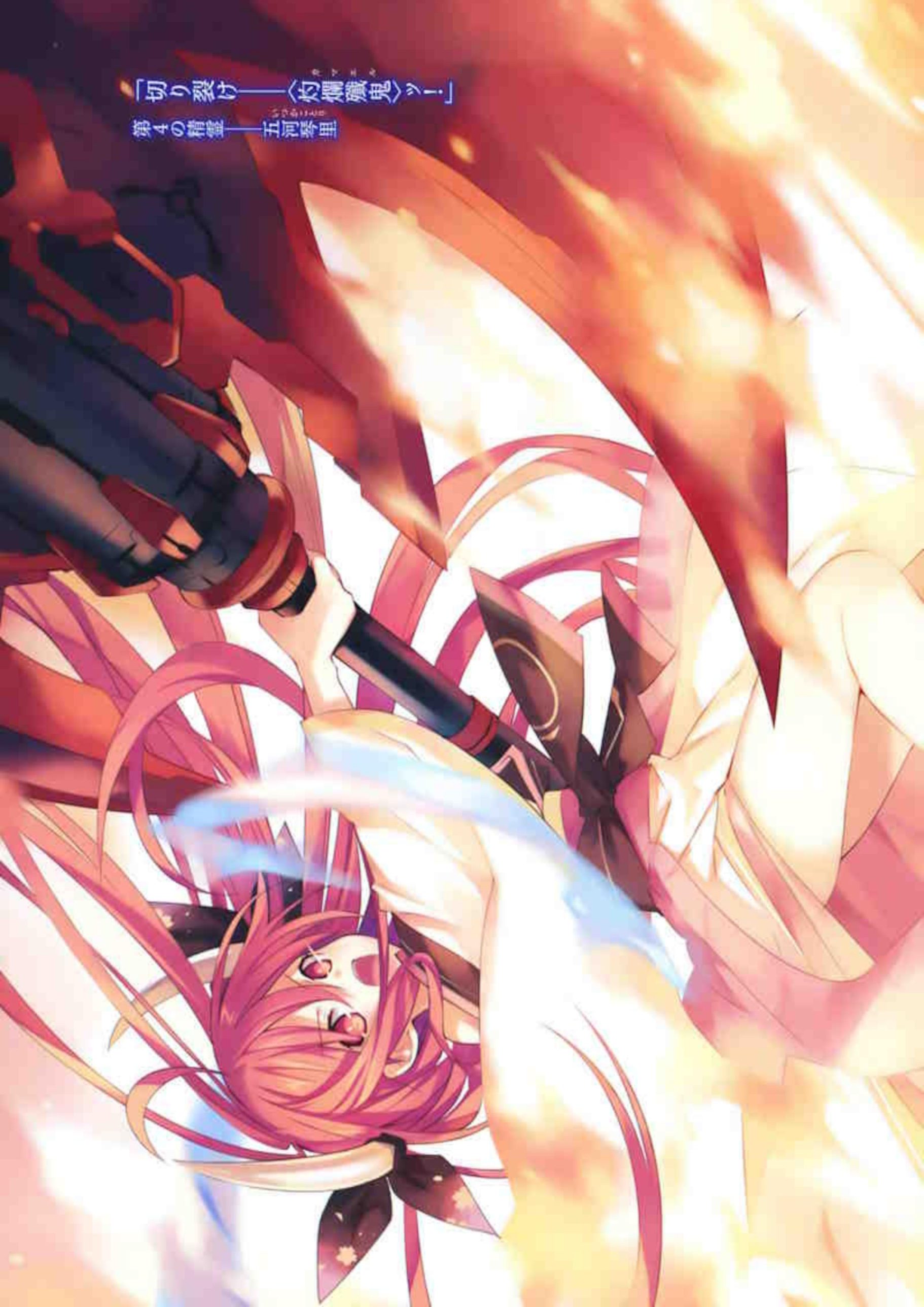
DATE A LIVE Ratri ITSUKA

デート・ア・ライブ 4

五河シスター


「切り裂け――〈灼爛殲鬼（カタルヒメ）〉ッ！」
第4の精霊――五河琴里（さがわことり）

『――ぎゅって、して』

土道のクラスメイト――鳶一折紙

『シャー、こ、これは似合うだろうか……？』

精霊＝十香

「折紙！　止めろ！　止めてくれ！」
高校生――五河士道

「――っ、士道。邪魔をしないで」

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五河シスター

Sister ITSUKA

Spirit No.5
AstralDress-StreetType　Weapon-HeavenlyType [Cannon]

精霊
SPIRIT

隣界に存在する特殊災害指定生命体。発生原因、存在理由ともに不明。
こちらの世界に現れる際、空間震を発生させ、周囲に甚大な被害を及ぼす。
また、その戦闘能力は強大。

対処法1
HOW TO DEAL (1)

武力を以てこれを殲滅する。
ただし前述の通り、非常に高い戦闘能力を持つため、達成は困難。

対処法2
HOW TO DEAL (2)

――デートして、デレさせる。

富士見ファンタジア文庫

デート・ア・ライブ4
五河(いつか)シスター

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Chapter 6: Time Penetrating Flame

Raizen High School's rooftop was currently encased in shadows .

It was not a metaphor.

The time was 17:00 hours and the sun had already begun to set, however the sky was still being illuminated.

Furthermore, between the stars and the earth, there was not a hint of cloud cover to block the sunlight.

It was precisely because of that that the location where Itsuka Shidou is at seemed to be separated from the surrounding scenery and is being covered by a shade of darkness.

It was extremely clear. Shidou and the rest were currently in the midst of a battlefield that could massacre the world.

The owner of the shadows had a whimsical attitude; she would cause an unexpected outcome when she feels like it. They were in a territory where their very existences could be easily consumed.

"....."

Within a space that had been separated from the rest of the world, Shidou widened his eyes, having difficulty breathing.

Don't talk about turning over, he couldn't even move. No, even speaking is problematic.

The reason for that was extremely simple. Shidou, at present, was currently having his limbs and body restrained by several girls and was firmly held down onto the ground. They were considerate to the point where they even inserted their slender fingers into his mouth, preventing his lower jaw and tongue from moving.

—Obviously it was an abnormal scene.

The rooftop was full of girls in black, and all of them had the same looks.

Black hair tied into unequal lengths on the left and right, skin so white one could have mistaken them to be ill. And that left eye that had a clock face and hands, just like a clock.

All of these girls, were all [Tokisaki Kurumi].

From one side, Shidou saw the figures of Tohka and Origami. The two of them were in the same position as Shidou and were pinned down by several Kurumis, having pained expressions.

Although Shidou was unable to see from his position, Mana, who had been shot down earlier, should be on the other side of the human wall created by Kurumi.

There was no place left to run. The fighting strength on Shidou's side had already been neutralized, an overwhelming difference in numbers.

——However.

"Ah....."

Under this kind of situation, Shidou was being entranced by something else.

In that state where his tongue was being clamped by fingers, his throat squeezed out unintelligible words.

In the instant Kurumi had raised her hand with the intention of triggering a spacequake.

That, appeared above the heads of Shidou and the rest.

At first that——looked just like the sun. Illuminating the territory of shadows that the real sunlight could not reach, a dense mass of flames that suddenly appeared in mid-air.

Just that sight already took up Shidou's entire line of sight.

However, in the instant he was about to recognize the true form of that mass of flames, Shidou felt an impact akin to having his brain electrocuted by an electric current. He saw sparks everywhere in his field of vision and somewhere deep within his brain throbbed with a sharp pain. It was as though his brain was rejecting visual information that may prove to be fatal.

That girl.

A petite girl, was standing in mid-air with her body and surroundings clad in raging flames.

Half of her sleeves were formed by the flickering flames, a white kimono. A sash of flames wrapped around what seemed to the celestial dress of a heavenly maiden. And that, growing out from both sides of her head, were two inorganic horns.

That posture. That strength, had without a doubt proven that this girl was not human.

A spirit. A calamity that kills the world.

With Shidou's knowledge, besides that, there are no other words that can describe the girl before him.

No——To be correct, there was, only one more word.

A name that is unique to her, Shidou knows it well.

"Koto, ri....."

Kotori, Itsuka Kotori. The face of the girl who he has spent many years with, he definitely could not be mistaken.

That spirit, no matter how you look at it, is Shidou's sister——Kotori.

".....Why....."

Shidou, who does not understand the situation, frowned. Kotori is Shidou's sister. So naturally she is a human. She couldn't possibly be a spirit.

However the scene that had unfolded before had totally denied his way of thinking.

Despite Shidou's efforts to reject it.....he felt that he had seen Kotori in this form somewhere before.

Even though digging through his memories proved fruitless, but the instant he saw Kotori, a feeling as though something inside his brain was expanding was present.

Right, that's correct, this was——

".....What the hell is going on?"

At this moment, as though intentionally breaking Shidou's train of thoughts, a voice sounded out from the front.

A gigantic clock behind her, a rifle in her right hand and a handgun in her left hand, Kurumi frowned as she glared at Kotori who was in mid-air with a face full of displeasure.

"I would appreciate it if you do not get in my way? I was just getting to the best part."

"I apologize for that, but that's impossible. You went slightly overboard back there. ——Kneel before me and let's start the punishing session of love."

At the same time she used her right hand to hoist the massive battleaxe onto her shoulder, Kotori let out a snort.

Kotori's words were probably out of Kurumi's expectations, Kurumi instantly widened her eyes, however that was quickly replaced by a wild laughter originating from her throat.

"Ku, kuhihihi, hihihihihihihi.....it's becoming interesting. By punishment, do you mean~~you~to me~?"

"Nn. If you do not wish to have a spanking, please withdraw your clones and Angel."

At Kotori's words, Kurumi started laughing again as though it was amusing. The countless Kurumi's standing around her made the same response as well.

"Hihihi, hihi. Although you look like you have total confidence in your ability, but being overconfident will cause you to self-destruct you know? My <Emperor (Zafkiel) of Time> is——"

"If you have time to spew nonsense then hurry up and attack, you black sow."

Kotori seemed annoyed as she sighed and Kurumi's face, which had been laughing just now, twitched.

The numerous Kurumis who were positioned all over the rooftop all turned to stare at Kotori with furious glares.

And almost at the same time, pained groans could be heard from the front. It seems that Tohka and Origami had been hit on the medulla oblongata by the clones and lost consciousness as a result.

"That's just fine. I'll get rid of you quickly——do it!"

Kurumi loudly shouted. Instantly, the clones of Kurumi on the rooftop all crouched down together and then leaped high to close in on Kotori.

Countless black bullets were fired into the sky. A heartless curtain fire of rifle and handgun bullets, instead of the word ' attack', the word 'assault' would be a better way to put it. Countless brutal monsters that were making use of an overwhelming advantage in numbers to pulverise the opponent. The large bullets bore closer towards Kotori.

"——Hmph."

However Kotori gave an annoyed snort, slowly raising the battleaxe on her shoulders.

On the front end of the pole that was way taller than Kotori's own height, the flames that were burning the very air itself compressed, revealing the shape of a blade. It followed Kotori's movements, tracing a crimson path, shining brightly.

"—— <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael>"

And then, in the instant the large group of Kurumis were about to reach Kotori, Kotori silently spoke. The flaming battleaxe was swung down in front of her with a frightening pressure. The sound of air being split asunder could be heard by Shidou even from his position.

"Ahahahahaha! It's use~less you know!"

In response to that, Kurumi let out another chuckle.

No matter how large that battleaxe was, it was impossible to eliminate the numerous Kurumis that were closing in on all sides. Even if she had butchered the few at the front, it's not difficult to think that other Kurumis would fill in the gaps in an instant.

However.

"Kihihi——hii.....?"

Suddenly, Kurumi's smile was twisted.

The instant Kotori swung <Burning Annihilating (Camael) Demon>, the tip of the blade of flames flickered——and at the same time, the heads, arms or the upper half of the numerous Kurumis that closed in on Kotori flew into the air.

"Ah, eh.....?"

The group of Kurumis stared at their dismembered body parts, dazedly making a sound. The next instant, they were all engulfed in flames, turning into ash before they even hit the ground.

"....."

Kotori wordlessly looked down——at Shidou's direction, once again waving <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael>. After which the flames slithered forward like serpents, rending apart the bodies of Kurumis who were surrounding Shidou.

Accompanied by the pitiful death cries, the burden on Shidou's body had vanished.

"____"

Shidou spat out the fingers that were inserted into his mouth, coughing repeatedly.

Soon after, the bodies of Kurumis that were split apart by <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael> burst into flames like before.

"Uu that's hot.....!"

Shidou hastily got up, *Pa Pa*, dusting off the embers that had landed on his body.

At this point, Kotori slowly descended between Shidou and Kurumi, readying <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael> against Kurumi . ——It was as though she was attempting to protect Shidou.

"Koto, Kotori.....What exactly is——"

"Listen to me, I want you to take the chance when Kurumi has an opening and escape. After all the current you——will die easily. "

"Haa.....? What exactly is——"

However Shidou's questions were cut off by the laughter at the front.

"Hihi, hihihihihihihihihi.....! Not bad."

Kurumi raised her eyebrows as she gripped the handle of her guns, raising one corner of her mouth.

"How~ever~, it's not the end you know?"

Saying that, Kurumi readied her two guns at the massive clock face.

Shidou held his breath. That's right. Kurumi still had that Angel —— the time-controlling <Emperor of Time[Zafkiel]>.

"Kotori, be careful, that is.....!"

"Fufu, Shidou-san, please don't do such a disappointing action as——that!"

Saying that Kurumi loaded the shadow that oozed out from the [I] Roman numeral from <Emperor of Time[Zafkiel]>'s clock face, aiming it at her temple, and fired.

Instantly, Kurumi's figure vanished like mist.

At the same time Kotori suddenly raised <Burning Annihilating Demon[Camael]> above her head. Following that, a

sharp sound came from that location,
<Burning Annihilating Demon (Camael)> slightly trembled.

Just before——a scene witnessed during the battle between Kurumi and Mana. <Emperor of Time (Zafkiel)>'s [The First Bullet (Aleph)]. It was a magic bullet that is able to cause the target's time to accelerate.

Using a speed that not even the shadow was able to catch up with, Kurumi endlessly continued her attack on Kotori.

"Ah~hahahahahaha! Excellent! Excellent! I expected no less from a spirit who had materialized her Angel——! It's burning, I'm all fired up!"

"How annoying. If you are still a lady, then how about retaining some manners?"

Swinging the pole horizontally, Kotori stated. Finally Shidou's eyes were able to see Kurumi's figure who had been sent flying by <Burning Annihilating Demon (Camael)>.

Kurumi who had jumped into the air smiled as she readied her guns in an unsteady position, loudly shouting.

"Thank you for your reminder. Then as per your request, I'll kill you off with a more elegant method. <Emperor of Time (Zafkiel)>——[The Seventh Bullet (Zayin)]!"

Following that, shadows flew out of the Roman numeral [VII] on <Emperor of Time (Zafkiel)> and were absorbed by the muzzle of Kurumi's guns.

At the same time, Kurumi pressed the trigger and a pitch black bullet traced its path, closing in on Kotori.

Position, speed, distance, no matter whichever way one looks at it, it was an unavoidable attack. Kotori readied <Burning Annihilating Demon (Camael)>'s blade of flames in preparation to knock the bullet down.

"Kotori!"

But——She couldn't. Shidou couldn't help but cry out.

[The Seventh (Zayin) Bullet]. That was the one most brutal move that Kurumi used to finish Mana off before.

Defending or intercepting has no meaning. The instant contact is made with the bullet——

"Fufu, ahahahahahaha!"

Accompanied by Kurumi's laughter, Kotori's body became motionless.

Leaving out the limbs for now, even the illusion-like sleeves of her Astral dress and <Burning Annihilating Demon (Camael)>'s blade, including her hair, were suspended in the air without exception.

"Ufufu, regardless of whatever strength you possess, it's useless once someone catches you right?"

The same time Kurumi finished, the remaining Kurumis around them readied their guns at the same time, aiming at Kotori and pressing the trigger.

"Sto——"

Shidou did not manage to stop them in time. The bullets that Kurumi fired mercilessly burrowed into Kotori's body. On that soft skin, countless horrible wounds were engraved.

"This is, really refreshing."

In the end, the Kurumi who had shot out [The Seventh Zayin Bullet] stood in front of Kotori, pressing the muzzle between Kotori's eyes , pressing down the trigger without hesitation.

The next instant, Kotori's body regained its movements.

"......!"

From the countless wounds on Kotori's body, blood spurted out . However Kotori did not react to this. Suffering from the momentum from the last attack, her small body fell backwards facing the sky.

"Kotori.....!!"

Shidou let out a howl as he rushed in front, hugging Kotori's body that fell to the ground.

However, it was too late. Her whole body was riddled with Kurumi's bullets, Kotori's body was brutally mangled in an alarming sea of blood, as though she would break apart from just a slight touch.

There was not even a shred of hope of her surviving. Shidou stared at his own sister's battered appearance as he used his arms to support himself on the ground.

"Ah, ahh....."

"Ufufu, fufufufufufu", aaah, aaah, it's over already. She was such a strong opponent that was hard to find. How heartless. How pitiful."

Kurumi spun on the spot with a tone as though she was acting, chuckling as though it was amusing.

"Now, then, this time it's Shidou-san's turn. I——"

Suddenly, Kurumi's words stopped.

Showing an expression of utter surprise, staring at the direction of Kotori who was lying on the ground.

Following Kurumi's eyes to look at Kotori, Shidou did the same as he widened his eyes in surprise.

"Th, this is——"

Leaking out a dazed sound. Flames sprouted out from the numerous gun wounds carved into Kotori's body, expanding as though attempting to lick her entire body.

Shidou had seen this scene before. No, to be correct——he had experienced this before.

".....Really now. You really went for the kill."

Using her heel as a fulcrum, Kotori unnaturally got up.

After the flames had dissipated, the wounds had healed, the blood was gone, the rips on her Astral Dress were nowhere to be found. Everything had disappeared.

It was unimaginable that she had just suffered from fatal wounds. The thought that the previous assault was merely Shidou's imagination resounded within his brain.

"Wha——"

She was definitely frightened by what she just saw and Kurumi raised an eyebrow as she took a step backwards.

As though noticing this fact, Kotori once again readied <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael>, glaring angrily at Kurumi.

"To me, it would be best if I made you lose your will to fight."

".....Hmph, don't joke with me——!"

Kurumi recovered, the guns on both hands pointed behind her.

Following that, the clock on Kurumi's left eye started to rotate round and round at high speed, the shadows seeped out of the Roman numeral [I] from <Emperor of Time[Zafkiel]>, going inside Kurumi 's guns.

"[The First Bullet[Aleph].....!"

Kurumi called out, rapidly pressing the triggers of the guns in both hands. [The First Bullet[Aleph]] hit the remaining Kurumis on the rooftop.

After firing off tens of [The First Bullet[Aleph]], Kurumi then turned the muzzle onto her chest, squeezing the trigger.

"——Tch."

Kotori clicked her tongue as though annoyed, her left leg suddenly kicking towards the back, hitting home to Shidou's side flank.

"Gue.....!?"

Making an odd sound due to the sudden impact, Shidou was sent flying to the back at the same time. After his lower back and head stopped due to friction on the ground. Shidou rubbed his head, got up and shouted.

"Wh, what was that for——"

However those words were never finished.

The Kurumis who had obtained astonishing speed began swarming around Kotori like they were trying to hold her in with a flurry of punches, kicks and bullets.

That's right, because before the Kurumis shot by [The First Bullet](Aleph) reached them, Kotori had wasted her valuable time by allowing Shidou to escape to a safe place instead of intercepting the attack.

"Tear them apart——<Burning Annihilating Demon>(Camael)!"

Kotori roared, <Burning Annihilating Demon>(Camael)'s blade grew to several times its original size, extending its reach even further.

Following that, numerous Kurumi's were hit by that horizontally swinging blade of flames, slashing, piercing, their bodies turning to ashes.

"Ku....."

At this moment, accompanied by a tortured moan, Kurumi retreated from Kotori's side.

It seems like she had been hit by <Burning Annihilating Demon>(Camael)'s attack. From her shoulder to her stomach, an unsightly slash wound that seemed to be like a burn formed.

"Who——do you think you are.....you brat!"

After that she raised her gun, calling out.

"<Emperor of Time (Zafkiel)>——[The Fourth Bullet (Dalet)]!"

Following that, Kurumi held the gun to her temple and fired, and as though time was rewound, Kurumi's wounds vanished without a trace.

Almost simultaneously, the Kurumi clones that were flying around Kotori had been incinerated, disintegrating into ashes and disappearing into the wind.

"Ara, it's already over? That was surprisingly easy. It's okay to bring out more of your power you know?"

Kotori rested the battleaxe on her shoulders, letting out a snort.

Those words caused Kurumi's expression to twist horribly and her teeth made grinding sounds.

"Those words——I'll make you regret that! <Emperor of Time (Zaaaaaaafkieeeeeeeel)>! [4A 1]

The instant her outburst ended, Kurumi's left eye started to turn at a speed that had not been seen before.

"! You're still not giving up.....!"

Looks like she felt a threat from that appearance. Kotori raised <Burning Annihilating Demon (Camael)> above her head. However——

"——Ah."

Kotori's throat made a light, extremely weak sound, kneeling on the spot.

Using <Burning Annihilating Demon (Camael)>'s handle as a support she barely managed to support her body, using the other hand to hold her head in pain.

"Ku.....Th, this is....."

"Koto, Kotori!?"

Shidou couldn't help but shout. Not understanding what was going on, but he only knows that Kotori was in trouble.

"Ah~hahahahahahahahaha! Looks like the tables are turned!"

Kurumi loudly laughed, aiming the rifle loaded with the bullet of <Emperor of Time (Zafkiel)> at Kotori.

"Ku——"

Shidou dashed forwards without thinking. He still has no idea what kind of effect will Kurumi's bullet have. However, one does not need to consider that it is a fatal shot that is capable of taking Kotori's life.

The instant Kurumi squeezes the trigger, he has to grab Kotori's body and evade that bullet no matter what. If that is impossible, then Shidou will use his own body as a shield.....!

——However.

"....."

The moment Kurumi aimed at Kotori, Kotori silently stood up.

"Kotori! Are you alright!?"

Even though he asked, but Kotori did not give a reply.

She only silently——used her flashing crimson pupils and continued to glare at Kurumi.

That face that he should have recognised, for some unknown reason, she now looked like a girl that Shidou did not recognize. " Koto, ri....."

Kotori raised <Burning Annihilating[Camael] Demon> high into the air and let go.

Following that <Burning Annihilating[Camael] Demon>'s blade vanished into the air, the pole portion still remained in position.

"<Burning Annihilating[Camael] Demon>——[Cannon[Megiddo]]."[4A 2]

As though replying to Kotori's voice, <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael> which had lost its blade started to rumble.

The handle withdrew part of its body, wrapping itself around Kotori's raised right hand.

Kotori, whose right arm was engulfed by the huge rod from the elbow, aimed the barrel at Kurumi.

——That form, was just like the cannon equipped on a battleship.

<Burning Annihilating Demon Camael>'s barrel slowly expanded, releasing a red glow.

And then the flames that were surrounding Kotori, were sucked into the mouth of the barrel.

"————!?"

Probably because she saw Kotori's appearance, Kurumi who was pointing the barrels of her guns at Kotori frowned. An expression that Shidou had never seen before. To put it in Shidou's own words and knowledge——That was a look that showed fear, or at least was on alert.

"[Us]!!"

The same time Kurumi shouted, the clones climbed out from Kurumi's shadow, attempting to separate the two of them.

Kotori, silently opened her mouth.

"——Turn to ashes, <Burning Annihilating Demon (Camael)>!"

Hearing her voice, it totally did not sound like his sister whom he had spent several years together with. It was a cold and calm voice.

The next instant——from the readied <Burning Annihilating Demon (Camael)>, a terrifying stream of flames burst forth.

It was as though the eruption of a massive volcano had been compressed into several centimetres, with an overwhelming heat, it drew a straight line from the roof of the school to the sky at the back. The surroundings was, in an instant, dyed vermillion akin to that of the early dawn.

"Guh....."

Shidou involuntarily used his hand to cover his face. Even though he barely breathed in the air, the heat that entered his nose had already began to burn his mucus membranes, preventing him from breathing. Despite being positioned behind Kotori, his skin still felt like he was being roasted, and even opening his eyes was painful.

Several seconds later, the heat ray that burned the heavens slowly decreased in size——the massive barrel equipped on Kotori 's right arm spouted white smoke as though completing its cruel assignment.

"Keho, ...Keho....."

Lightly coughing he looked up.

When the smoke that had clouded his vision cleared up—— Shidou's shoulders gave a slight jolt.

The ground of the roof and the fencing had melted due to the horrifying heat, nothing was left from that assault——However over there, the figures of Kurumi and <Emperor of Time Zafkiel> remained.

However the clones who had appeared to protect Kurumi had already turned into ashes and vanished, while Kurumi herself had lost her left arm. It was probably blown off due to the terrifying heat, and the stump had a burnt black colour similar to charcoal. Not a drop of blood was spilled.

Also, <Emperor of Time (Zafkiel)> that was floating behind Kurumi had a quarter of its gigantic clock face pierced through, and the position where the Roman numerals [I], [II] and [III] were supposed to be was beautifully gouged out.

Kurumi squeezed out a gasp, weakly crouching down.

No matter how you look at it, she was in no state for battle.

——But.

".....Pick up your guns."

Kotori said in a low voice, aiming <Burning Annihilating Demon (Camael)> which had turned into a cannon once more at Kurumi.

"The fight is not yet over. The battle is not over you know. Now , continue to kill, Kurumi. This was the battle that you have wished for. It's the one that you desired.——If you don't point your guns at me, then please die."

"Kotori.....? Wh, what are you saying?" Shidou ran to Kotori's side, grabbing her shoulder.

"If you fire off another one, she'll really die! Isn't it <Ratatoskr>' s mission to resolve issues without killing the spirits!?"

However, Kotori did not pay heed to Shidou's words. <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael>'s barrel once again began to suck in the flames.

".....! Oi, oi, Kotori!"

Shidou moved to Kotori's front——and then held his breath.

"Wh——"

Cold pupils, eyes that were flashing with an odd red glow. Her mouth had a smile on it, an expression that was close to being enraptured by delight.

——That's not right. Shidou shivered. It was obvious that this was not the usual Kotori that he knows.

The instant he realized this, Shidou started to run. ——Towards Kurumi who was crouching on the ground helplessly.

"Kurumi!"

"Shi——dou, san.....?"

It was already too late to escape with Kurumi. Shidou stood in front of Kurumi, in an attempt to reduce the injuries that she could be receiving.

At the same time, within <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael>, the crimson roar that could incinerate everything was once again released.

Suddenly——

"!"

Kotori who had <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael> equipped, suddenly widened her eyes.

"Onii-chan.....! Dodge it!"

Shouting that, she pointed <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael> on her right arm into the sky.

But just doing that is not enough to completely alter the direction of the flames that had already been released——

"_____"

Everything in front of him was dyed in a shade of red, and Shidou's consciousness blacked out at this point.

Burning. Burning. Everywhere is burning.

Burning. Burning. The streets are burning.

Burning. Burning. The whole world is burning.

Shidou's vision was dominated by the flames.

Crackling. Rumbling. Roaring.

Even so, Shidou still did not stop in his footsteps.

(Kotori.....! Kotori!)

Calling out his sister's name, he only concentrated on making his way through the streets of what seemed to be an underground hell.

Despite this, Shidou still seemed like he did not understand what was going on.

But this was something that could not be helped. When he was preparing to go back home, he just happened to discover that the streets that he was familiar with had been engulfed in a sea of flames.

Today was Kotori's ninth birthday. Shidou went to the station in order to buy a present for her. Perhaps this was the reason why he had avoided the disaster, he has to thank Kotori for that—— However the problem was that Kotori herself, was still at home. It was Kotori's birthday, yet their parents were not at home due to work as usual. Currently, only Kotori was at home.

That cry-baby Kotori, must definitely be crying due to being unable to shake off that feeling of loneliness.

The instant that figure flashed past his brain, Shidou began to run.

Kotori. Shidou's cute little sister. The one who gave a family to the orphaned Shidou, a gentle girl.

Long ago, when he was abandoned by his own birth mother, when he was wallowing in the depths of despair, Shidou was saved by his foster parents as well as Kotori.

So, this time it was Shidou's turn to save her. If it was for Kotori , Shidou would not hesitate to give his life for her.

(Kotori——!!!)

Shouting again and again, he ran towards the direction of his house.

However, at this point Shidou stopped. In the streets before him , the smouldering flames that were still spewing smoke had vanished without a trace as though they had been sucked away.

At the same time, in the middle of that. A petite little girl was weakly sitting on the ground while crying.

(That is——)

A girl that was oddly dressed. Oversized sleeves and skirt that was part of a kimono, the horns on her head. And that white sash wrapped on her body. Surrounding her body, flames were flickering back and forth.

However, Shidou quickly recognized that girl as his cute little sister.

Kotori she, was crying.

——Shidou's actions, did not need any other information aside from this.

(Kotori!)

(Uu, ah, ah, O, Onii-chan....., Onii-chan, Onii-chan.....!)

However, the instant Shidou went to Kotori's side, the flames clothed around Kotori began to grow rapidly.

Kotori widened her eyes in shock, and her shoulders began to tremble.

(Onii-chan! Don't come any closeeeeeeeeeeeer!!)

Using a voice that was mixed in tears, she yelled at a volume that could have torn her throat up.

"——Eh?"

Shidou made a dazed sound.

But that can't be helped. When he had realized it, Shidou's body had already been hit by the expanding flames from Kotori and was lightly sent flying.

(Ah——)

His back hit the ground with a crunch. A strong sense of pain ran through his back, the skin on every part of his body was screaming in pain from the burns. However, despite Shidou painfully rolling around the ground, he was unable to even cry out . Although he had, with his blurred vision and consciousness, stared up at the sky and made short gasps.

If it was like this he'd rather lose consciousness. He couldn't even move a finger, only pain tortured his entire body. Recognizing that he was about to die, he felt a sense of fear of the unknown.

(Onii-chan.....!)

Following that, Kotori seemed frightened as she ran over to him .

Despite thinking a few seconds ago that it could have been better if he had just lost consciousness, his brain easily changed its mind. Right now to Shidou, being able to see Kotori's face was a reward that nothing in the world was able to exchange for.

Huge teardrops fell from Kotori's eyes. When the tears made contact with Shidou's burnt skin, a sharp pain assailed him. However, Shidou grit his teeth as he tried his best to keep from

groaning. If he'd let this cry-baby Kotori continue crying, then Shidou would have failed as her elder brother.

In his blurry field of vision, Kotori's face was streaming with tears. The sky was slowly losing its colour. Everything, seemed to be becoming blurry.

However.....Just at that moment.

[——Hey, do you want to save her?]

Such a voice, sounded out from above Shidou and Kotori.

「——Tsss……

A dull pain cut the urge to sleep that was within Shidou's head. Shidou rubbed his forehead as he lightly groaned.

There were no wounds that he could see. Leaving out cuts, even bruises were nowhere to be seen. If there were any uncomfortable places left then it would be the dull pain that resided in his head.

Opening his eyes after groaning for a while, a ceiling full of piping entered his vision.

At this point, Shidou finally realized that he was lying on a bed.

"This place is....."

Shidou blinked a few times, observing his surroundings. The beds were evenly spaced apart, surrounding each bed was a curtain used for separating purposes.

It was a familiar place. Shidou had previously slept here like just now.

That's right. This place was the <Ratatoskr> organization's airship <Fraxinus>'s infirmary.

Shidou, in attempting to clear his mind from sleepiness, sat up while lightly knocking on his head.

"Ow ow ow....."

It wasn't just his head, but every joint in his body hurts. Shidou frowned slightly.

Next was, not knowing why but there was a sense of unfamiliarity on his lips. He probably touched something before he had passed out.

However, Shidou quickly forgot about such things. The reason for that was simple. A familiar girl was resting on his bed and sleeping.

Beautiful night-coloured hair, skin as smooth as pottery. A face as perfect as though it was handmade, her sleeping position was akin to that of characters in a fairytale. .....Well, it would have been perfect if she did not have drool coming out from her mouth.

"Tohka.....?"

Although Shidou called her name, the girl——Yatogami Tohka did not reply. Only her shoulders rhythmically rose and fell, silently sleeping.

"Why is Tohka at a place like this.....No wait, in the first place why am I——"

At this moment, Shidou's muttering was stopped mid-way.

The door of the infirmary suddenly opened, and the footsteps of two people could be heard.

".....Nn? Aaah, you're awake huh, Shin."

Wearing a chestnut coloured military uniform, a woman in her twenties looked at Shidou and spoke.

Having two eyes that are surrounded by dark eyebags, she was the analytical officer of <Ratatoskr> that had snow-white skin that hinted at her shut-in lifestyle, Murasame Reine.

"Reine-san? And——"

The same time Shidou replied Reine, he suddenly looked behind her. There was a girl thirteen to fourteen years of age, hiding behind Reine.

The girl had hid her green hair that is impossible to grow naturally in this world and her beautiful aquamarine eyes under a sunhat that had a large rim. Her left hand had a rabbit puppet that looked silly in design; it occasionally waved its little hands.

"Ooh, Shidou-kun. Wh~y, you don't seem very energetic. We were worried."

"If you're okay.....then, that's great."

After the puppet finished speaking with exaggerated movements, the young girl let out a faint voice.

"Even Yoshino is...What exactly happened.....?"

"Muu——"

".....Ah, aaah, sorry. Yoshinon is here too."

Shidou apologized to the puppet who voiced out its displeasure . He looked back towards Reine.

"Then, Reine-san. Why am I, in such a place.....?"

".....Nn. Yesterday, after the battle with Tokisaki Kurumi, we brought you who had just lost consciousness here."

".....!"

Tokisaki Kurumi. The girl that suddenly transferred into Shidou 's school——a spirit.

The instant Reine said that name, the dull pain that almost disappeared inside Shidou's head resurfaced.

The scene from yesterday, clearly reappeared within his mind.

"That's right, ah.....! Wh, what happened in the end? Why is Tohka not waking up? Is she alright? What about Kotori? That person, suddenly appearing like that.....Then again, what was that appearance of hers.....! And Origami!? She should have also been in critical condition after what Kurumi did to her!"

".....Calm down first, Shin."

"——Right, how's Mana!? I didn't see her after the middle of all that! Is she alright!? And Kurumi——Is she alive as well!? Everyone in the school as well——"

At this point, Shidou's words suddenly stopped, to be accurate, they were forcibly stopped.

That's because Reine had hugged the head of the frantic Shidou, forcefully hugging his head.

"Nn—! Nn—!?"

".....Alright alright."

Saying that, Reine lightly stroked Shidou's head. However Shidou was only able to feel the sensation of her warm chest.

Shidou raised his two arms to Reine to indicate his surrender. As such, Reine released him a few seconds later.

".....Have you calmed down?"

"Ha, Haa....."

After forcefully letting out a sigh, he raised his head and threw a questioning glance, Reine nodded in response to his action. Yoshino who was at the back used her hands to cover her flushed face, but she still peeked through the gaps between her fingers.

".....Relax. Everyone is fine. There were no casualties as far as I know. All nearby hospitals are in a state of bursting from the number of patients. Tobiichi Origami and Takamiya Mana were recovered by the AST members who arrived later, they should have been transported to the JSDF's Tenguu Hospital. They have medical realizer units equipped there——In Kurumi's case, she took the opportunity to escape. Tohka, as you can see. Despite her wounds, she insisted on looking after you. She probably fell asleep due to the fatigue?"

"....."

Hearing Reine's words, Shidou clenched his teeth and balled up his fists.

——In the end, Shidou had not solved a single thing.

He had previously said that he will definitely save Kurumi and Mana, yet he did not accomplish anything.

Kurumi and Mana both suffered serious injuries, Origami and Tohka as well as everyone from school were dragged into this as well. Furthermore, he was unable to seal Kurumi's power too.

"Damm——it....."

Cursing in regret, he whacked his mattress.

".....You have already done your best. Don't blame yourself too much."

"B, but.....!"

"The fact that Kurumi was hiding a power of such strength, nobody had expected that. Why not be glad over the fact that nobody had died. If you still wish to save Kurumi, then think about how you are going to use those two hands of yours to hit her face and scold her.

".....Yes....."

Shidou said as he restrained his feelings——Suddenly he widened his eyes.

Reine's words, still did not mentioned an important person.

"Reine-san.....! Kotori. Where is Kotori right now?"

He supported his upper body as he asked, however Reine did not reply as he had hoped.

".....I'll lead the way. Can you stand?"

"Ye, yeah."

Shidou folded the blanket, wearing the shoes that were below the bed and stood up. However——probably due to the long time spent lying down, he felt dizzy when he stood up, and his balance was ruined.

".....!"

At this moment, Yoshino ran over from Reine's side, supporting Shidou's upper body.

"Oo, oh, sorry. Thank you, Yoshino."

"No, no need....."

Shidou bitterly smiled and said, while Yoshino seemed embarrassed as she lowered her head. [Yoshinon] on her left hand started to whistle *Shu——*.

".....Are you alright? It would be better if you rest a little longer ——"

"No, I'm alright. Aside from this, let's hurry up and go to where Kotori is."

Reine looked at Shidou while narrowing her eyes, after which she lightly sighed and nodded.

".....Follow me."

Saying that, she slowly turned around. After Shidou had placed Tohka on the bed, he started walking after her.

Yoshino supported Shidou's waist as they moved forward together.

"Yoshino? I'm alright already you know?"

"....., Ah, yes.....but, that, it's still dangerous."

Was Shidou so weak in Yoshino's eyes?

But there was no reason to forcefully reject her kind gesture. Shidou bitterly smiled as he said ".....Then, I'll be counting on you. ", walking onwards, for some reason the rabbit puppet kept smirking, but it seemed the same as always so he did not pay much attention to it.

With Yoshino accompanying him, their footsteps sounded out inside <Fraxinus>'s narrow hallway.

Along the way, Shidou suddenly frowned. He thought they were walking towards the usual direction towards the bridge, however Reine changed direction midway.

Just like that, after walking for a few minutes.

".....Here."

Looking at the door in front of Reine who had stopped, Shidou involuntarily held his breath.

Shidou was not very familiar with the interior make-up of < Fraxinus>. Despite stepping inside many times, not once was he given a detailed tour of the place, the only places he had been to were the bottom of the ship where the transfer unit was located, the bridge, the infirmary, the restroom, the cafeteria and the sleeping quarters.

To be honest, as to where his exact location was within the ship as well as what this room is used for, Shidou had totally no idea.

Even if that was the case, from the heavy door that looked like a door to a bank's vault, it wasn't difficult to deduce what was it built for.

"This place is....."

Despite him sending questioning glances, Reine did not make a reply. She stood in front of the electronic lock installed beside the door, and after inputting the password she placed her hand on it.

".....Analytical Officer. Murasame Reine."

After her name was said, the electronic panel gave off a faint sound, the door opening from both sides.

".....Now then, let's go."

Reine entered the room. Shidou forcefully cleared his throat as he followed behind her.

Following that, Shidou's eyebrows furrowed. A very peculiar room. The front part and inside of the room were separated by a wall made of glass, using that as a boundary, the interior of the room was oddly decorated.

In contrast to the cramped and dark laboratory where various machines were placed alongside Shidou and the rest, the interior looked as neat as an apartment room where normal everyday life takes place.

It was just like a space used to observe and restrain ferocious beasts.

And in the deepest part of the room, separated by glass, was Kotori. She was coolly sitting on a chair, elegantly drinking red tea.

She was not wearing her Astral Dress but her usual casual clothing. The usual appearance of Kotori, Shidou sighed in relief.

"Kotori!"

Her name was shouted. However, Kotori did not reply.

"Sound is unable to pass through here. ——Shin. From here you must go in alone."

Saying that, Reine started walking once more. Towards a corner of the glass wall, where a door seems to be located.

Yoshino left Shidou's side. After Shidou gave her a short reply of gratitude, he walked towards Reine's direction.

Reine did the same procedures as before, fingerprint recognition, voice print recognition, opening the door. Shidou slightly lowered his head and entered the room's depths. At the same time, that glass wall that separated the strange room entered his field of vision.....His relaxed sense of awareness was rudely awakened once more.

".....Nn? Ara, aren't you Shidou. I see you have woken up."

At the same time, Kotori had noticed the intruding Shidou.

"Oo, oh....."

Not knowing why, he felt slightly out of place, Shidou used an unnatural tone to reply.

"Well don't just stand there, why don't you take a seat? If you wish to be a scarecrow I'll support you you know?"

"Ah, no.....Nn, right."

After being told off like that, Shidou sat down on a chair opposite Kotori. At the same time he glanced towards the direction of Reine and the others but he could not see anyone. On the other side, what seemed to be a glass wall that separates the room became a white wall that can only be seen on this side.

"....."

"....."

The two of them silently stared at each other while separated by the table.

There was a mountain of stuff that he wanted to say, but when he was in front of the person in question, he did not know what to say.

Kotori did not seem to be in a panic, after putting cinnamon into her milk tea and stirring it——she placed it in her mouth directly.

".....That's not right, isn't that Chupa Chups!"

Shidou couldn't help but cry out. That's correct. Dipped into the red tea was not cinnamon, neither was it a spoon nor was it a stirrer, it was Kotori's favourite lollipop.

"What's that, you got something to say?"

"No, none at all!"

After his shouts, Shidou let out a sigh. .....Somehow, he felt that his shoulders had relaxed without him knowing. Within his heart he silently thanked the Chupa Chups, Shidou opened his mouth to speak.

"Kotori. ——What, kind of person are you?"

"I'm Shidou's cute little sister of course."

".....It's not very convincing if you call yourself cute!"

"I'm not cute?"

".....Well, I'm not going to deny what you've said."

Shidou scratched his head, placing his hand on his knees, lightly lowering his head.

"Kotori.....Are you, a spirit?"

No beating around the bush, a straightforward question. He asked the question that he was most concerned about.

Kotori snorted as she shrugged her shoulders.

"Hmph, if I were to say no you wouldn't even believe me right?"

"Aaah. If you were to say that you aren't, I'll believe you."

".....Really? To trust in others and not your own eyes, that's not a wise move."

"Even if I was a smart person, if I were to not believe in my cute little sister, I would have failed as an older brother."

"....."

Kotori placed the teacup onto the saucer, wordlessly observing Shidou.

After eye contact was exchanged for several seconds, she gave a light sigh.

".....I am, human you know. At least, that's how I think of myself. ——However, that's not the case. Because the monitoring system's values have already classified me as a spirit."

"What is.....going on?"

Shidou began frowning due to him not understanding the meaning being Kotori's words. Kotori, who would usually snap at him, treated it like it was expected as she continued speaking.

"I am a human that was born into the Itsuka family. This fact is definitely true. However, around five years ago. ——I, became, a spirit."

"Haa.....?"

Shidou whose eyes have turned to dots, widened his mouth and let out a dazed sound.

Spirits were existences who live in a territory known as the otherworld. They were classified as special biological disasters. At least that was what Shidou had heard from Kotori and Reine.

"What on earth is going on. Humans and Spirits, weren't they different species from the start?"

"Well.....that's right. To put it simply, 'I became a human that holds a spirit's power, that should be more accurate."

"That kind of thing....."

Midway through his words, Shidou suddenly frowned.

A certain scene surfaced within his head.

"Ah——"

That dream. The one that he saw before he woke up, that dream .

In the midst of the burning streets, Kotori who was wearing her Astral Dress and crying alone——that dream.

"Is something wrong, Shidou?"

"Ah, no.....I——remem.....ber.....that.....?"

"What's the matter?"

Kotori questioned. That serious expression of hers made Shidou unknowingly take a step backwards.

"E, even if you ask me what's the matter I....."

"Meaning to say, the fire five years ago——the issue of me turning into a spirit, Shidou you've completely forgotten right?"

"Ah, that's right.....how do you put it. .....About that, don't laugh okay?"

"I won't laugh."

Kotori nonchalantly hugged her two arms, Shidou scratched the back of his head as he spoke.

"That, just now, in my dream....."

"Dream? What kind of dream?"

"Aa, aaah....."

After Shidou finished narrating whatever he could remember in the dream, Kotori turned her slightly blushing face to one side.

"Well, although there's a differing point where I was crying and repeatedly shouting Onii-chan.....but it was rather consistent with my memories."

Kotori used her hand to support her chin as she went into deep thought, and after that she raised the stick of her Chupa Chups.

".....It could be, because I took back my spirit power from Shidou, it caused memories to backflow from the connection. At the same time, it also triggered Shidou's own memories.....? Nn, this is interesting."

Kotori seemed to be pondering something, she lightly nodded.

".....Don't just understand everything by yourself. Aside from that, Kotori."

"Nn? What is it?"

Kotori raised her head and looked at Shidou.

"Turned into a spirit——That's what you've said right. Then five years ago, what exactly happened?"

Spirits and humans were totally different species. Humans turning into spirits midway——or rather, humans gaining the power of spirits and the like, what on earth is going on.

However Kotori shook her head.

"The thing is, I can't remember it at all."

"Haa.....? You can't remember it.....huh."

"Nn——I can vaguely remember what happened, but the exact details evade me. Ah no, I still remember becoming a spirit you know? But I don't remember well the reasons to turn like that."

".....Don't go and forget such an important thing!"

"I don't want to be told that by an older brother who forgot that his sister became a spirit."

"Guh....."

Shidou couldn't reply to that. However, another question surfaced once more.

"But.....you seemed to be used to battling at that time."

Shidou recalled the scene on the roof. That's right, Kotori, despite letting the opponent escape, had without a doubt beaten Kurumi.

"It's really unbelievable. Although I've been through mock battles, it was my first time fighting. .....Although, well, because my memories become blurry when I become a spirit, I have no idea what exactly happened, my body just moved as though it knew how to fight, that really gave me a shock."

"Wha.....Th, then what about the spacequakes neutralizing each other——"

"Aaah, that was just a rash attempt. Although Reine's plans did show such a probability, I really don't wish to do that again. If it were to fail the spacequake would magnify in magnitude you know."

Kotori nonchalantly spoke, and Shidou perspired.

After that, Kotori sighed as she continued.

"But.....Well, Shidou is right too."

"What?"

"I shouldn't have forgotten such an important issue. I have to agree on this point. Shidou aside, this kind of important thing that screwed up my life, I should have not forgotten it so easily."

"What's that 'Shidou aside' for....."

Shidou half-closed his eyes in displeasure. However Kotori ignored him as she continued to speak.

"Five years ago, the two of us who were there both lost our memories. .....Don't you find that suspicious?"

"....., Now that you've mentioned it....."

"In other words, who erased our memories?"

"Wha——"

—— Who had, erased the memories of the two. This extremely uncomfortable sentence caused Shidou's eyebrows to rise.

Indeed, if the realizer unit were to be used——or if it was a spirit that has an unknown power. Those possibilities are not ruled out. However, just who was it and for what purpose did they do it ?

Looking at Shidou's reaction, Kotori shrugged.

"Well, those were just a few of the many possibilities."

Even though Kotori attempted to play it down, but Shidou's back was still drenched in sweat.

If one were to think of it that way, then it would match up.

However, since he couldn't remember, then it would have no meaning if he thought about it now. Also, Shidou had another urgent question on hand.

"But.....after that, Kotori, you had returned to an ordinary lifestyle right? What happened?"

At the very least, from the fire five years ago till now, Itsuka Kotori had lived an ordinary life with Shidou. This fact he was extremely clear about.

However, Kotori questioned him with a "Haa?".

"If we're talking about that can't you recall? It must have been Shidou youself that sealed my power right?"

"Eh?"

Shidou let out a stupid sounding voice.

"M, me.....?"

"Nnn. ——I did say it yesterday right? I'll· temporarilybe takingitback, or something like that."

Now that she said it, yesterday when Kotori appeared, she did say that.

"Me, huh....."

Shidou used his hand to hold his forehead, lightly groaning. The pain his brain felt when he saw Kotori in her Astral Dress resurfaced once again.

He——could not recall. Despite being able to remember other events no matter how blurred they were, but once he tried to recall the incident from five years ago, he was unable to properly remember.

"That's correct. .....After Shidou sealed my power, I was selected by <Ratatoskr>. After that——understanding what was truly happening in this world and the existence of spirits.....I, wish to save them."

"....."

Why did Kotori, who hasn't even reached fourteen, take up the commanding position of a secret organization like <Ratatoskr>, the question that he had till now..... finally had an answer.

As such, Kotori continued to speak.

"Choosing Shidou as the mediator for spirits, this was also the reason. Although I don't know why, but you do have the ability to seal the power of the spirits."

"Ah——"

Shidou widened his eyes.

He indeed had that question. Even if Shidou did have that kind of power, but how was he discovered by <Ratatoskr>?

There was no reason for that. That's because five years ago, there was Kotori to act as a living proof.

With that being said then it all matches up. Each time she was shot by Kurumi, the wounds carved onto Kotori's skin would be covered by flames and recovered.

That was undoubtedly the source for Shidou's regenerative power.

"Then that means——"

Probably guessing Shidou's thoughts from his expressions, Kotori nodded.

"That's correct. Shidou's revival ability was originally mine to begin with.....then again. Shidou, please stand there for a while."

"Haa? Wh, what for?"

"Alright now, hurry up."

Shidou stood up as Kotori had asked.

Suddenly, he suffered a punch to the solar plexus from Kotori, and Shidou fell to the ground with his body bent into a '＜' shape.

"Guha.....!?"

"Said it didn't I, I have, told you already correct? Remember this now. The you as you are now will die easily. But what? In order to save Kurumi you desperately ran in front of <Burning Annihilating Demon (Camael)>.....! If I did not regain consciousness in the nick of time and bent its trajectory, if I was too late, you would have been turned to charcoal by now.....!? And you've let Kurumi escape as well! Hey, are you listening!?"

"I, I heard you.....I heard you so stop shaking me so hard already....."

Shidou was barely able to nod. After a while, Shidou whose breathing had finally recovered went back to his seat, letting out a sigh.

"Ow ow.....what was that for?"

"Hmph. Only punishment lies in wait for disobedient dogs."

Shidou wanted to retort, but he swallowed his words back in. Aside from that, there was something that he was more concerned about.

"Kotori, just now you, mentioned something about 'regaining consciousness' right?"

"....."

Kotori's eyebrows twitched.

Shidou recalled the incident at the rooftop. The Kotori who had pointed <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael> which had turned into a massive cannon at Kurumi. No matter how you look at it, it did not feel like the usual Kotori at all.

Kotori sighed as though she had given up.

".....I did say that."

"However, to put it nicely, you were still able to accurately launch attacks at Kurumi. That was——"

".....I'm not too sure myself. After retrieving my power from Shidou for a day.....Occasionally, I would have the urge to destroy something, thoughts to kill someone——my body wouldn't listen to myself. Currently I am barely able to control myself with the use of medicine.....I was, at that moment, undoubtedly intending to kill Kurumi."

"Wha....."

".....It could be that because Shidou ran in front of Kurumi, I was able to become myself again. For that I guess I should thank you."

Shrugging her shoulders with a sense of sarcasm, Kotori showed a bitter smile.

However, Shidou was unable to reply to that. The information he had heard from Kotori just now chaotically knocked onto Shidou's brain.

As such, Kotori continued.

".....I'm afraid. I don't know what exactly I have done. I, have no way to control myself. There's a possibility that even though I don't have any memories, but I may have done something five years ago. ——That's why, in that portion of my missing memories , a possibility that I may have killed someone exists. If that was really the case, I——"

"Kotori....."

At this point, Kotori stopped speaking. She shook her head from side to side, as though trying to shake off her fears.

"Forget it. I've said something unnecessary."

"Aa, aaah..... But.....Your power, is it still inside of you?"

"Nn. If it wasn't, would I still have to be imprisoned in a quarantine room with such tight security?"

Saying that, she turned her head as though surveying the room.

Although it looks like a finely decorated room, but to Shidou who had walked in from the entrance, it did not feel like a room that would make one feel happy.

"B, but when Tohka's power flowed back to her, it would return . Then why——"

"That's because the power that flowed back to Tohka was extremely little. As long as Tohka's mental state remains stable, it would be able to flow back to Shidou through the connection. —— However, it's different in my case. Almost 100% of my power had been withdrawn from Shidou's body. Therefore, it wouldn't flow back anymore."

"Th, then what can we do to——"

Shidou barely squeezed out his words. Probably finding his expression to be hilarious, Kotori bitterly smiled as she spoke.

"Then, we just have to reseal it again."

"R, reseal.....? How?"

"It's simple."

Saying that, Kotori took out the Chupa Chups from her mouth, pointing it at Shidou.

"——Please, make me fall for you."

"Ha.....Haaa!?"

Kotori's words made Shidou let out a dazed sound.

"Make you, ...fall for me.....What on earth, why....."

Shidou questioned while feeling troubled, Kotori once again placed the Chupa Chups back in her mouth, picking up the teacup and lightly shrugged.

"It's the same as Tohka and Yoshino. ——Sealing the spirit's power, there's no other way."

"Th, then what should I....."

Shidou recalled the encounters with Tohka as well as Yoshino.

Go on a date to raise their affection. ——And, in the end.

"....."

Shidou's eyes unconsciously moved to Kotori's lips.

Meaning to say, to use the same method as that time with Tohka and Yoshino——

"....!"

At that moment, a sharp sound suddenly sounded out, Shidou's body gave a jolt.

It looks like the teacup that Kotori was holding had fell. The white ceramic teacup shattered. The remaining milk tea had spilt all over the floor.

"Koto, Kotori? Are you alright, are you hurt?"

Shidou frowned as he asked out of concern, Kotori closed her eyes as she took a deep breath and shook her head.

"……I'm fine. You don't have to worry."

Saying that, Kotori grabbed her right hand with her left, hiding it under the table as though trying to avoid Shidou's gaze.

"Even if you tell me to not worry……"

"I've already said that I'm fine. That aside, I'm feeling tired now . May I be alone for a while?"

"No, that won't do. Alright, show me your hand, it could have been cut——"

"……Shin."

At this moment, just as Shidou was about to extend his hand to Kotori, the sound of a door opening behind him was heard and a voice called out. Reine entered while holding a black bag.

"Reine-san? What's the matter?"

"……Aaah, I'm sorry but let's end it here for today."

"Eh? B, but……"

"……I'll take care of Kotori. Now, hurry."

At Reine's words, Kotori lowered her head and started to groan.

"Ha, haa....."

If they put it that way Shidou had no choice but to listen to their instructions, passing through the door and returning to the room where Yoshino was at.

Suddenly Shidou felt a sense of unease. He looked to the room where Kotori was held at, the wall that was transparent like glass had turned white, there was no way of discerning what was going on at the other side.

"What is going on.....?"

After several minutes, Reine walked through the door to where Shidou was at.

"Reine-san, Kotori she....."

"Aaah, it's alright now. Don't worry. At least for now."

"F, for now....."

"....."

Reine wordlessly sat on the chair, shutting her eyes.

".....Two days later."

"Eh?"

"Two days later. On the 22nd of June. Please go on a date with Kotori."

"Haa. That.....Well, even though I've already heard, but why two days later?"

".....There's only that day left. I'm afraid that any longer, Kotori would be unable to withstand the power inside her."

"——!?"

Reine's words made Shidou nervous.

"Wh, what do you mean.....!?"

".....Her relapses, are becoming more frequent. I've just used sedatives and stabilizers to get her under control.....But more or less, she can't hold on any longer than two days. If we were to miss that window, Kotori would probably not be the same Kotori that you know anymore."

"————"

This time not even a sound was made. His throat felt dry, his fingers trembled slightly.

It was so sudden. The worst case scenario had appeared without warning.

After this, in two more days. Kotori, would not be Kotori anymore. ——If Shidou was unable to seal off her power.

"Th, then, right now——!"

Reine seemed to be in deep thought as she used her hand to support her chin, then sighed as though she given up on something.

".....Really, it would be best if that was the case."

"Eh?"

".....No. That won't work. I've told you right? She's under the influence of drugs right now. We have to wait for her condition to be stable before we can act."

"B, but, two days later is— —"

".....That's why, the only day that fulfils both criteria is that day . If we were to miss the day after tomorrow, we'll never have another chance again."

"Guh....."

Shidou gritted his teeth hard. Reine softly sighed as she looked towards the control point.

".....For now, please leave it to me. Shin, go and look after Mana . If it's now, you might be able to make it before visiting hours are over."

Reine seemed to be chasing Shidou and Yoshino out as she pointed towards the door.

"B, but——"

"......I beg of you. For now, please do as I say."

"......I understand."

Noticing the oddity in Reine's attitude, Shidou obediently followed her instructions, walking out of the room with Yoshino. In the end, he said "I'll leave Kotori to you.", giving a deep bow.

After that, he walked towards the bottom of the ship—— towards the door where the transfer unit was located.

"......Make Kotori, fall in love......huh."

At a volume where Yoshino, who was beside him, could not hear, Shidou muttered to himself.

If he does not do so, Kotori would not be Kotori anymore. ..... However.

To make Kotori. To make his little sister. To let that violent and headstrong Commander Itsuka Kotori, fall in love.

After repeating it once more, he realized that this was a mission of the highest difficulty.

Chapter 7: Kotori Conference

What filled her vision was a scene as though she had seen hell itself.

The usual residences and streets were engulfed in a sea of crimson flames. Whether it was the houses that were parallel to each other, the trees that were located on her usual way to school or the vegetation in the park, everything that was flammable was being burned by those flickering flames without exception, one by one they were reduced to charcoal and ashes.

Accompanied with the loud crackling sound of the massive conflagration, were the screams and footsteps of escaping humans, and occasionally, a loud sound akin to an explosion would be heard.

"What……is this……?"

Witnessing a scene that was so surreal, Origami could only let out a dazed sound.

A meaningless action. She did not move when she said those words, it was obviously not a wise thing to do.

However, one should not criticize her for doing such a foolish act. It would be too much to expect a twelve year old girl to quickly understand the current situation.

That's because on her return trip after buying groceries, the streets that she saw before she went off had completely turned into

something different. She could only kneel down on the spot as Origami tried to calm down.

Suddenly——At this moment, Origami's eyes snapped open.

(Dad, Mom……!)

That's right. Dad and Mom should still be at home.

The instant she remembered, Origami immediately threw down the bags she was holding, sprinting back home.

Even if a small kid ran over she wouldn't be able to do anything , moreover they might have already escaped. However Origami, who was in extreme confusion, was unable to make such a deduction. She could only sprint down the streets which had greatly changed since a few hours ago.

After several minutes, Origami who had finally made it back home had her face painted with an expression of despair. Origami's house was wrapped in the same crimson flames like the other houses and she could barely make out black shadows within the flames.

(How can this, happen……)

It was not like she did not think of it. But even so, until she sees them with her own eyes, Origami still clung to that fragment of hope. However, it's impossible like this——

(——!?)

After that, Origami's shoulders gave a jolt. The door to her home, was kicked aside from the inside.

And from there, her father with his forehead full of sweat, walked out while carrying her mother.

(! Dad! Mom!)

Origami desperately shouted at the top of her voice, shouting for the two of them.

(Y, you've come back, Origami!?)

(Are you hurt? It's dangerous here. Hurry up and escape!)

Saying that, her father extended his hand towards her and walked closer.

Origami was delighted by the fact that the two of them were alive. Tears streamed down from her face and she sniffed a few times. Following that, she stretched out her hand in order to grasp her father's hand——

(————Eh?)

Suddenly, Origami made such a sound, as though something had happened.

The instant Origami stretched out her hand, light seemed to shoot down from the heavens.

A strong shockwave followed, and Origami's body was thrown into the air.

(Ah……!)

After flying several meters and hitting a mud wall, she coughed a few times. A rib must have broken, causing her sides to hurt a lot .

It was painful enough for her to break out in tears. However, she was more concerned about her parents' safety. She was barely able to resist the tears, turning to look at where she flew from.

——However, there was no one left. The ground where Origami's two parents were standing on had been gouged out, turning into something like a mini-volcano.

As though wriggling, she inched closer.

After that.

(Ah, aa……ah……Aaaaaaaaah——)

Looking at what used to be her parents on the ground that was gouged away, Origami's teeth gave off chattering sounds.

Her eyes felt an overwhelming sense of dizziness. A feeling as though the world had been twisted. A crimson world that was slowly dyed in the black and grey colors of despair was corroding Origami's consciousness.

Why. How. Meaningless questions floating around her head, continuously circulating as she could not get an answer.

(——)

Origami raised her head. That light that burned her parents to death. To determine its origin.

And then……her body, was once again unable to move.

(An Ang——el……)

Dazedly muttering in a low voice. Over there was——an Angel.

Of course, she realized that it was something that should not exist in this world. But there was no other words that Origami could use to accurately describe the existence before her, that was a fact.

Pain blurred her vision, she was unable to properly see clearly, but that thing in the air definitely had a human shape.

Floating in the air as though surveying the burning streets, a slender outline. ——It was probably, a young girl.

That figure used her hand to touch her head, causing her body to slightly tremble.

That was, instead of lamenting——it looked more like she was mocking them.

(It was you, huh……)

——To Dad, and Mom.

The latter half of her words were unable to even come out from her throat. She tightly clenched her bleeding fists, grinding her teeth, hatefully staring at the angel that was dancing amongst the sea of flames, letting out a voice that was full of curse and hatred.

(I, won't forgive you……! Kill……I will kill you……! I——will definitely……!)

At this moment, Tobiichi Origami regained consciousness, opening her two eyes in surprise.

"……, ……"

Although she had been sleeping the whole time, her breathing was erratic.

After Origami sat up, she took deep breaths to get her rapid heartbeats under control. Air with a slight hint of disinfectant circulated inside her nose and lungs.

Having gotten her breathing under control, Origami slowly looked around, reaffirming her surroundings.

A white ceiling, white walls. From the corner of her eye, she saw a rack that was probably used to hang an I.V. drip.

Immediately she realized that she had been sleeping in the JSDF hospital where she usually got medical care. Furthermore, it was a personal room specially prepared for her.

"……"

Wordlessly, she wiped her forehead. Her head had been carefully wrapped in bandages, but it had gotten wet due to perspiration as she slept. Of course, other bandages aside from her head as well as her hospital clothes were wet as well. Origami loosened her clothing, letting them dry.

Usually there shouldn't be this much perspiration during sleep ……It could be, because of the dream that she had just now.

Five years ago. The scene where Origami's parents died.

The name of the existence which she had mistaken for an angel, was soon known to her.

Special biological calamities, spirits. A huge conflagration was single-handedly created by that nonhuman existence.

However——This nightmare had not occurred for a long time already. Why did she suddenly have it again?

"——!"

Remembering this fact, Origami held her breath.

Recalling why was she here.

"Shidou……!"

Calling out the name of her lover. That's right. Origami had been battling with a spirit on the rooftop, Tokisaki Kurumi——she had lost consciousness after being pinned down.

She was extremely concerned about the safety of Shidou and Mana, as well as Kurumi's motives (there was a lifeform that one would have mistaken for as garbage, but it would be better if she did not notice it at all). Since Origami survived, the probability that the others are alright is high……However she could not deduce any further. In any case, she needed information.

Origami closed her eyes trying to search for her memories before she passed out——Recalling that moment, she gulped.

While Origami was pinned down by Kurumi's clones, as Kurumi walked closer to Shidou.

From the sky, an unbelievable object appeared.

"The Spirit……of Flame……!"

Origami recalled that figure that was reflected into her eyes, speaking in a voice that was dyed in hatred.

The Spirit of Flames. Codename <Efreet>[4B 1]. Five years ago, the spirit who set fire to the residential district Nankou-machi.

——Appearing in front of Origami's eyes was the spirit who killed her parents.

"I've found you. Finally……"

For five years she had searched non-stop for her enemy. With the aim of killing the target of her revenge even if it meant risking her life doing so. Even though it was coincidental, Origami had finally found it.

Her heart beat rapidly and her breathing that was under control after much difficulty had once again become ragged. Her sorrowful wish was finally coming true, and feelings akin to ecstasy raced through her head.

But……why, there was something amiss. The spirit of flames who appeared on the rooftop——<Efreet>'s face, compared to that of five years ago, was somehow different.

But what was the problem. Even though she frantically pondered, but she could not figure out why. Origami thought for a few minutes before raising her head and getting off the bed. Wearing the slippers that had been set aside, she stood up.

It can't be helped if she can't think of it now. Since Origami was moved into here, that must mean that Mana should also be inside the hospital. If she's here, she might know more in-depth information.

Origami ignored the slight dizziness as she stepped forward——but stumbled back onto the bed due to the drip that was still on her arm.

"It should be……here."

Shidou compared the map to the massive building in front of him, lightly muttering.

The words [JSDF Tenguu Hospital] were written. Looks like this is the correct place.

"That girl……I really hope she's okay……"

Yesterday, Mana who was the first to arrive to Shidou's aid had faced off against Kurumi, and had her time stopped by Kurumi's [The Seventh Bullet]. She should have suffered severe damage.

Zayin

He heard that she had been transferred into the nearest JSDF's hospital, so he specially came to visit.

Entering the door, he walked up to the reception counter.

"Excuse me……"

"How do you do, is this your first time here? Normally you would require a recommendation……"

When Shidou began a conversation, the female receptionist spoke.

"Ah, no. I'm here to visit. May I ask where is the room Takamiya Mana is currently at?"

"Takamiya-san? May I ask if you are a family member?"

"That is……yes, that's right."

Shidou mumbled as he nodded.

That's correct. Takamiya Mana is Shidou's real sister. ……She should be.

While Shidou did not have an exact memory, Mana herself insisted that she can't be wrong……If he were to deny it here there 's no doubt that he would be questioned about their relationship. It 's better to just agree for now.

"Please hold on for a moment."

The female receptionist manipulated the computer with experienced hands.

After several seconds, she widened her eyes in surprise, looking at Shidou once more.

"That is……I'm really sorry, Takamiya Mana-san is currently in a special treatment room. We have to reject all visitors."

"Eh……!?"

Shidou involuntarily let out a sound.

"Is, is she in danger?"

"Who knows……They don't release detailed information to us ……"

"However if it's family then I have the right to——"

"I'm extremely sorry……Currently for the treatment of Takamiya Mana-san we are using extremely special equipment and it is against regulations for us to explain them to outsiders……"

"How can this……then may I please ask of you a favor? At least let me take a look……"

"E, even if you say it like that……"

The receptionist made a troubled face. And then——at that instant.

"——Shidou?"

From Shidou's back, a familiar voice called out. Turning around in wonder, he saw over there a girl in a patient's robe, leaning on an IV drip stand.

"Origami?"

That's right. His classmate Tobiichi Origami was standing right there.

Long hair extending to her shoulder, a girl with a rather attractive doll-like face. Her forehead was wrapped in bandages, plasters were pasted onto her slender limbs.

Origami looked at Shidou's face, breathing a sigh of relief. Despite having no change in expression, it felt as though she finally relaxed.

"Are you alright?"

"……Nn, nn."

How to put it, to have someone directly ask and worry about himself, he felt somewhat embarrassed. He scratched his face and turned his face aside.

However Origami continued to scrutinize Shidou's face while continuing to speak.

"What about Yatogami Tohka?"

"——!?"

He got a shock due to Origami's words, once again turning his face towards Origami.

It was understandable. Tohka and Origami, they would definitely argue the moment they see each other. To think that Origami would be concerned for Tohka as well.

It could be that Origami had finally recognized her as a classmate and is finally willing to understand Tohka. He felt happy somehow. Shidou exaggeratedly nodded his head.

"Nn, Tohka is alright as well."

"Tch."

"Eh?"

"It's nothing."

For an instant, the cool Tobiichi-ojousama had shown an expression that was not hers, but he was definitely thinking too much. Determined that it was so, Shidou bitterly smiled.

"B, but, why are you here. The patient wards should be one floor up right?"

Origami's gaze did not shift as she replied.

"In order, to know Mana's ward. ——And Shidou?"

"Nn……So that's why. I'm the same, I came here to visit Mana."

"I see. To visit?"

"Nn, nn, that's right."

"Only Mana?"

"……That is……A, also to visit Origami……"

"Is that so."

Origami's expression remained unchanged as she spoke. But why, it somehow feels like her mood has improved. ……His conscience hurt a little.

"Well then, where's Mana warded at?"

"Ah, nn……from what they said, she's currently in surgery, therefore we are not allowed to meet. So right now I can only ask of her to……"

"……, if it's like that, then waiting would probably be useless."

"Eh?"

"Even though I can't explain in detail, but they should be using extremely secret equipment to conduct the surgery. No one is allowed to meet her until she is moved to a common ward. You would be restrained if you attempt to enter by force."

"……"

Shidou's eyebrow twitched. Highly classified equipment. That would most likely be the Realizer for medical purposes. Reine had indeed mentioned that they would be used in this hospital.

The Realizer that has the technology to turn imagination into reality was the country's highest secret. Hence it was understandable that there would be such a reaction.

"……I understand, I'll come back tomorrow."

After Origami nodded, no further words were exchanged. …… She just kept staring into Shidou's eyes.

A long period of time was spent in silence.

It was disastrous to be standing right in the middle of the hospital's hallway, although he understood that doing so would bring inconvenience to everyone, but how do you put it, he had lost the opportunity to do so.

Sweat kept pouring from his face as he squeezed out a line with much difficulty?

"U, um……Origami? Aren't you going back to your room?"

"I'm returning."

"I, is that so. Then I should go back too……"

And then, as Shidou was intending to walk out of the entrance, Origami suddenly *Pata!*, bent her knees and fell to the floor.

"Ori, Origami!? Are you okay?"

Hastily crouching down, he grabbed her by the shoulders and helped her up. It seemed that she hurt herself when she fell down, her nose and forehead were red.

Because of the exaggerated fall, the staff and patients around them made expressions of extreme shock. However Origami seemed unfazed by the ruckus caused by the crowd, looking at Shidou.

"I can't return to my room by myself."

"……"

"Accompany me back."

"……That's……"

"Accompany me back."

"……I, I got it already."

Shidou nodded in surrender.

"Then……can you walk by yourself, Origami?"

"It's difficult."

"……Is that so. Then wait for me. I'll go borrow a wheelchair."

After that, as Shidou planned to stand up, Origami tugged at a corner of his clothing,

"Uu, is something the matter?"

"I don't like wheelchairs."

"Eh? Why?"

"I will get carsick."

"……"

Will someone get carsick from a moving wheelchair in the flat hallway of a hospital?...What exactly is an AST member that is used to flying around with a CR-Unit talking about? Although there were a lot of things that he wanted to ask, Shidou decided not to talk about that for the moment.

"Th, then what should I do?"

"Carry me."

"Haa?"

Unable to imagine that those words came out from Origami's mouth, Shidou couldn't help but question back.

No, actually this solution had already been within his expectations……But how to put it, he never imagined that it would be suggested by that Tobiichi Origami.

"Carry me."

"Th, that's……"

"Carry me."

"……Alright."

Realizing that resistance was futile, Shidou turned his back to Origami. In an instant, Origami lightly got up, pressing herself into Shidou's back. It was hard to imagine that she was feeling dizzy just now after seeing her nimble movements. It might be more honest to say that his back had been possessed than to say that he carried her.

"Uu……"

Carrying Kotori who fell asleep in the living room had been a daily chore, so he was used to carrying girls……But as expected, this somehow felt different. Aside from the slightly greater weight than Kotori, a softness unique to girls was accurately transmitted. ——To put it in words, it somehow feels that she was being closer than she needed to be.

"……Origami? I, I think you're using too much strength there?"

"Nothing of the sort."

Saying that, Origami clung even tighter. Her breasts,which was covered by a thin patient's gown, were forcefully pressing themselves into Shidou's back.

"Uu, gu……"

In an objective point of view, Origami's development could not be said to be doing particularly well……However its close combat capabilities were terrifying. Shidou felt his face burning, and

frantically shook his head in order to maintain consciousness, single-handedly pushing the IV drip stand connected to Origami's wrist.

"Th, then……Origami. Where's your room?"

"The west building. Third floor. Room Number 305."

"Okay——I understand."

Shidou nodded to show his understanding, and started to walk while pushing the IV drip stand with one hand.

Following the directory sign, walking past the hallway between the middle building and the west building. After that——

"Waaah!?"

When they were about to reach the connecting hallway, Shidou made a girl-like sound.

Origami's fingers were moving erratically, moving around Shidou's body as though trying to lick his entire body.

"Ori, Origami. It's itchy……"

"Is that so."

Saying that, Origami's fingers finally stopped. Breathing out a sigh of relief, once again he started to walk.

Reaching the west building, they took the elevator to the third floor, walking forwards as per Origami's instructions.

Some time later, it was his nape that was being teased.

However, Origami's two arms were still wrapped around Shidou's neck. Shidou felt that something was off as he frowned. ——The reason was quickly discovered: accompanied with the sound of breathing, there was a feeling of someone breathing down his neck.

"Ori, Origami……!?"

Hu—Ha—Hu—Ha—.

"Wait a moment……"

Hu—Ha—Hu—Ha—

"Hey hey……."

Showing a troubled expression, he turned his head around. However.

"Hyi!?"

At this instant the back of his neck felt something that was beyond his expectation and Shidou couldn't help but jolt.

Even though her two hands are not moving, but Shidou's spine felt as though it was being stroked, a tickling sensation.

"What!? What did she just do to me!?"

Shidou finally got his chaotic brain under control, sprinting to the designated Ward number 305 and placing Origami on the bed that was inside.

"……"

After Origami was deftly put down, she licked the region around her lips for some reason.

"Haa……, Haa……"

Even though he had only walked for a short distance and Origami's weight couldn't be considered to be that heavy, he felt abnormally tired. Shidou leaned on the wall for quite a while as he readjusted his breathing.

After approximately a minute, he observed the room with his heartbeat finally calmed.

It was a room that had white as its main theme. In a space of roughly three tsubo, a bed, cabinet, television and chairs were furnished, there was probably a previous visitor as the vase on top of the cabinet had flowers in it and the basket had apples placed inside.

"That……Then, Origami. I should be leaving now."

Then, as Shidou said that, Origami's stomach began to grumble.

"? You haven't had your meal?"

Origami nodded in reply.

"That so……Should I help you get a nurse over?"

"……"

However Origami suddenly raised her head, taking the apple that was placed on the cabinet.

And then, taking the fruit knife that was also placed inside the basket, handed them both to Shidou.

"Peel it for me."

"Eh? Aaah……alright."

He has no reason to reject her demand if it was just this. Shidou sat on a nearby round stool, accepting the apple and fruit knife, placing that basket on his knees and then started to peel the apples .

To Shidou who frequently cooked in the kitchen, this was an extremely easy task. Not even a minute was spent to divide the apple into eighths and then to line them up on a nearby plate.

"Alright, will this do now?"

Saying that, he passed the plate over to her. However Origami did not seemed satisfied, shaking her head left to right and did not extend her hand for the plate.

"? Why, Origami?"

"Feed me."

"Wha……"

Shidou stopped moving with his hands still trapped in the action of handing over the plate and his shoulders trembled for a moment. However he could not remain so wretched any longer. Faking a cough, he opened his mouth.

"No…..You are able to do that at least this right?"

"I've been told to avoid strenuous activities."

"But you were walking around freely with that drip stand of yours just now."

Origami ignored Shidou's words, opening her mouth with an " Ah——"

"……, really now……I guess I don't have a choice."

Picking up a piece of apple whilst sighing, he brought it to Origami's mouth. Then Origami twitched her eyebrows as though she was genuinely surprised.

"If you can't move your hands then at least move your mouth——"

"……! Don!"

It somehow feels that his words were left unheard. That's because Origami suddenly bit into the apple, forcibly ending his sentence.

Origami looked at Shidou as she ate half of the apple piece, chewing away and swallowing it down. She seemed to be wanting the remaining half in Shidou's hand, her mouth once again opening up.

"Uh, here you go."

And then, once Shidou handed out the apple slice——Origami, in one large bite, held it in her mouth along with Shidou's fingers.

"Uu!?"

This was totally beyond his expectations. He involuntarily made a sound in shock.

"Ha, haha……are you a natural airhead?"

Shidou gave a weak smile, letting go of the apple in Origami's mouth and withdrawing his fingers. In that instant, Shidou's wrist was tightly held, preventing it from being withdrawn.

"Eh……? Eheh!?"

"……"

Ignoring Shidou's surprised screams, Origami held his wrist tight and started to lick Shidou's fingers. *Lick* *Lick lick* *Lick lick lick* *Suck suck* *Kiss* *Suck*

"Hey, hey, Origami……! No, wait, really——Ori, Origami-san!?"

Shidou yelled in a high-pitched voice and his hands started to flail about in panic, finally escaping from Origami's hands. Shidou's fingers and Origami's lips that had been connected till just now, a glistening thread of saliva extended out ……What an erotic scene, Shidou's face couldn't help but turn red.

"Thank you for the meal."

Origami wiped her mouth and put her hands together, lowering her head in a bow. Shidou wiped his hands while his face had perspiration all over.

"Is……it okay now?"

Shidou had just ended his sentence when Origami pointed to the top of the cabinet.

"That."

"Uh?"

Looking in the direction Origami had pointed. There was a simple electronic thermometer placed.

"I need to take my temperature."

"Aaah, is that so."

Shidou took the thermometer, handing it to Origami. However, Origami did not reach out and take it.

"Uh, what's wrong? Didn't you want to take your temperature?"

"It's difficult to do it by myself. I hope you can help me."

"Haa?"

Shidou frowned as he questioned back.

"N, no no no. Don't you have to just place it under your arm?"

"Excessive exercise."

"……Alright alright, I understand."

Somehow it feels like he's being taken for a ride, but it can't be helped. Shidou sighed as he took out the thermometer from its packaging.

"Now that you said it……how exactly am I supposed to help take your temperature. There's actually nothing I can do right?"

"You sit over here."

After Shidou questioned in surprise, Origami, *Don Don*, patted the bed.

"Ah? Aaah……"

Shidou tilted his head and sat at his designated spot, Origami got up, sitting in front of Shidou as though she was being hugged from behind by him. It was coincidental that their positions were now completely opposite from just now.

"! Ori, Origami……?"

He could vaguely see her snow-white nape moving closer to his face from the gaps between her hair. Shidou's eyes started to wander.

However Origami did not mind at all as she undid the buttons of her gown, revealing her chest.

"……!? Wh, whwhwhwhwhwhwhwhwhwhat are you doing Origami!?"

"When Tokisaki Kurumi transferred into our school, Shidou you were attracted to her by her actions."

"Eh……Eh?"

"I've deduced that being aggressive is effective."

Origami muttered to herself, grabbing Shidou's right hand that was holding onto the thermometer. And after that, she slowly guided it to her left armpit.

"——Stick it inside, Shidou."

"……!?"

"The thermometer."

Although they were not talking about anything indecent, Shidou somehow felt extremely embarrassed.

"No, this, as expected this kind of thing is……"

"If you can't then please help wipe my body down and help me change——"

"I'll do it! It would be great if I could take your temperature for you!"

"Is that so."

Origami seemed a bit down as she nodded, turning her head back to the front. Shidou took a deep gulp, moving the trembling hand holding the thermometer closer to Origami's armpit.

"……!"

Then, the instant the thermometer's tip touched her skin, Origami's entire body quivered.

"Are, are you alright, Origami?"

"It's fine. It was just a bit...cold."

"Is, that,so……"

Rearranging his feelings, the thermometer once again moved.

"……, Ah——, ……Uh——"

Each time, Origami would make a soft sound that could only be heard from his distance, a sound like moaning, like panting, an indescribable voice.

The usual Origami would definitely never give voice to such a gentle and seductive sound. Each time it reverberated in his eardrums, Shidou's brain cells ascended to heaven by the thousands.

"Uh……Shidou, even——deeper, a little."

"……Um, excuse me."

"If, you……did not, stick it in properly……then you can't…… properly, measure it."

"Oh, oh……"

It was just taking her temperature, then why, why did he feel like he had just done something that he should not have. It must be his imagination. It has got to be his imagination.

Shidou started to mentally recite the Prajna Paramita Sutra[4B 2] (even though the content was jumbled) to calm his chaotic mind and he stuck the thermometer inside Origami's armpit.

"Uuuh……"

Instantly, Origami trembled for a moment, arching her body.

After that, Origami's breathing became more rapid.

"Ori, Ooooooooooorigami……?"

"——Please stick it in, tighter."

"Ma, may I ask…..w……why?"

"The thermometer……will fall."

"Ah……That is, nn……that's right."

Despite Shidou putting it that way, he exerted more strength in order to let Origami's armpit hold the thermometer more tightly.

That's right, he would be unable to accurately measure her temperature if the thermometer falls off and an error occurs, that was something that can't be avoided. This is unavoidable. This was the laws of the universe that cannot be overturned by a puny human like Shidou.

Arms, chest, stomach, Origami's softness and body temperature were transferred without exception. And a faint smell of sweat wafted from her neck into Shidou's nostrils. It somehow feels like

someone had opened his skull and stirred up the contents, resulting in him not understanding anything anymore.

——,And then, at this moment the refreshing beeping sound of the thermometer rang out and brought Shidou's consciousness back to reality.

"Ha!"

His confused eyes sprung open and he took out the thermometer from Origami's armpit.

"Ah……"

At this point Origami's body trembled once more, but he tried to distract himself by looking at the numbers on the thermometer.

"36.2 degrees……I, it's normal."

"……Is that so."

Origami said with a tinge of regret, buttoning up her front with slow movements. After which, she turned around to look at Shidou once more.

"Shidou."

"Wh, what is it……?"

"You're very……skilled."

"……, I, is is is is, that so."

Shidou did not have a clue as to what he was skilled in, but he felt that he would be even more troubled if he asked for an explanation so he nodded his head and replied.

"Th, then……I'll go back now. Origami, you have to take care of yourself."

Shidou moved his body, maneuvering his body around Origami's back and getting off the bed. Just like that, he headed for the door. However,

"——One last thing, is that okay?"

Origami voiced out from behind him.

"……What is it?"

He could sense a foreboding bad omen, asking in reply. What kind of request is it this time. ——However, Origami said something unexpected.

"Yesterday. I hope you can tell me about what happened after our battle with Tokisaki Kurumi. ——There should be another spirit that came from the sky. Wearing an Astral Dress that looks like a kimono, the spirit that uses flames."

"_____"

Shidou involuntarily held his breath.

An alarm bell started to sound in his head. Origami was definitely asking about Kotori.

"Do you remember?"

"……Ah, aaah."

Shidou hesitated for a moment, before nodding his head.

Although it was a bit blurry, but since Origami had seen Kotori, there's no meaning in hiding it. More accurately if Shidou said that he did not see a spirit, it would be extremely suspicious.

Shidou couldn't tell if Origami had noticed his panic. She continued to speak in a calm voice.

"At that time, before I was knocked out by Tokisaki Kurumi, losing my consciousness. ——No matter how fine the details, I hope that you will be able to tell me about the location of that spirit of flames."

"No……that, how do I put it, because I was knocked out too, so I'm not too sure about the details."

"……, is that so. If you do remember something, I hope you will tell me immediately."

Hearing Shidou's words, Origami sighed in relief.

"Oh, oh……"

Shidou nodded, but he felt an indescribable sense of unease.

Origami was an AST member. Taking down spirits is their mission. So wanting to know information about newly appeared spirits is understandable…… But how to put it, there seems to be something wrong with Origami.

"Why do you want to know about that spirit so much……"

"That is because."

Origami's words were cut off at this point, softly biting on her lip as she continued.

"Do you remember about what I said before?"

"About before……?"

"About my parents being murdered by spirits."

"——, aaah……I remember."

Shidou nodded to indicate his acceptance. He would never forget. The reason for Origami's hatred for spirits, hatred for the calamity that kills the world. That was, the incident five years ago.

"Five years ago. The one that triggered that large fire at the residential district at Nankou-machi, the spirit that burned my parents. ——It was, that spirit of flames."

"Wha——"

Shidou was speechless.

Placing his hand on his stomach, a feeling as though his lungs would scrunch up every time he inhales. His breathing became more pained with each breath and an urge to throw up surged in his stomach.

Taking a deep breath, breathing it out. He repeated it once more , thinking about what Origami had said. ——However, Shidou's mind could only find chaos and unease.

Origami, she definitely did say it before.

The spirit of flames killed her parents.

——Kotori, killed her parents.

"——,Always, I've always been searching. Always, endlessly searching."

It seems like she did not noticed Shidou's confused look, Origami continued to speak.

"I just happened to find it. I finally found it.

Kill it. Kill it. I must kill it. Using, my own two hands.

I've spent these five years only for this.

For this instance, I joined the AST.

For this instance, I obtained the Realizer unit.

For this instance, I've honed my movements and skills.

All of that, was so that I can take down the criminal.

All of that, was so that I can confront the spirit of flames.

All of that, was so that I can kill <Efreet>."

With a forcefulness that could not be usually imagined, Origami continuously spewed out curses.

Her expressions were dry. Her voice was flat. She did not make any exaggerated gestures. However even if it was like that, her words were dripping with venom and hatred that would make people who heard them shudder.

<Efreet>. That should be the codename given to Kotori who had turned into a spirit.

——Five years ago. Then, it was indeed a match with what Kotori had said.

"But, how can that be, don't tell me……that girl——"

"? Do you know something?"

Origami tilted her head. Shidou hastily shook his head left to right.

"No, no……That's not the case."

"Is that so."

Once Origami said that, she began to avoid Shidou's gaze. Instantly, Shidou felt as though his shoulders had lost strength as though they had been released from their bonds. However, he did not intend to end the topic right here. Shidou was hesitant as he started to speak.

"Ori, Origami."

"What is it?"

"If you can't talk about it then forget it……But if possible, I hope that you can at least tell me a little more about the spirit from five years ago? B, because, I think I might be able to remember something from that……"

As Shidou said that, Origami seemed to agree as she nodded.

"That day. I was on my way back from buying groceries——"

Origami started her story with a calm voice. The fact that her parents, who were thrown into that disaster, were originally alive. However, the spirit appeared, killing her parents in front of Origami's eyes. Because of her blurry consciousness and vision,

she was unable to determine her identity. Not long after she found out about the spirit who was the cause of that disaster——<Efreet>.

It was already five years since it happened, however her words had not stopped even once. ——It was as though, she had experienced it just yesterday.

"……"

Listening till the end, Shidou's heartbeat accelerated as though he was annoyed.

That's because, the information that Shidou was expecting, was not heard from Origami's mouth.

Meaning to say——That spirit was totally different from Kotori.

To Shidou, the possibility of Kotori killing Origami's two parents, was definitely zero.

"——That was how it was."

Only that, before hearing that vital piece of information, Origami's account ended.

Shidou felt like falling down and he took a step towards Origami.

A little. Even just a little is fine. Wanting to obtain evidence that Kotori was not the criminal, he asked her a question.

"Is, is there anything else……? That, compared to the spirit that you saw yesterday——"

However, just at that moment.

"——This announcement is made for those who are still visiting . Today's visiting hours have ended. Everybody who are still in the hospital, please leave as soon as possible. Repeating once again——"

An announcement rang from the direction of the hallway, cutting off Shidou's sentence.

"What is it?"

Origami tilted her head, wishing to hear Shidou's question once more. However, Shidou calmly shook his head.

"It, it's nothing——nothing at all. Take care of yourself, Origami."

Origami nodded her head in reply. Shidou hastily left the ward before she could speak to him once more.

There should still be a few more minutes till visiting hours ended.

However, Shidou was unable to ask again. Although it was true that he was affected by the announcement. But, Shidou himself knew why he didn't ask Origami once more.

——He, was definitely, afraid.

——From Origami's mouth, the evidence that the spirit that had appeared five years ago was actually Kotori.

"……"

He tried not to make any sound when closing the door, turned towards the hallway and started to walk.

Despite being in the corridor of a hospital. It was also dangerous, so he could not walk too quickly.

However, it was as though he was at a loss of what to do, his footsteps naturally quickened in pace. In order to rein in his rapid heartbeat he placed his hand to his chest and his shoes made clattering sounds.

"……"

After that. The only thing that made Shidou, who did not intend to stop until he left the hospital, stop was the handphone that suddenly vibrated in his pocket.

Speaking of which, when he entered the hospital, he had forgotten to turn his handphone off. Hastily walking out of the hospital, he took out his handphone from his pocket and answered the call.

"Yes……Hello?"

"……Hello, is this Shin?"

"Reine?"

Due to his haste in answering he did not have time to determine the caller, but because of that sleepy voice as well as that 'Shin' nickname, it caused him to immediately know the identity of the caller. ……Even though they had already known each other for quite some time already, Reine still did not manage to remember Shidou's name.

"……Aaah. Are you done visiting Mana?"

"Ah……Yes. Well, I should be."

"……? What a vague answer."

"That is, it's actually being processed, I can't visit her yet."

"……Hmm, is that so."

Saying that, Reine replied in a low, pained voice.

"? Is there something wrong?"

"……No, there's nothing. That aside, Shin, are you able to come back to <Fraxinus> immediately? It's about Kotori……"

"……!"

The name that Reine had spoken caused Shidou to go speechless.

Kotori's look before he left <Fraxinus> and Origami's words mixed together and caused his insides to feel extremely painful.

"D, did something happen to Kotori!?"

"……No, that's not the case. The reason for meeting, is to open up a strategy meeting."

"Strategy meeting?"

Shidou frowned as he asked, Reine replied, "……Aaah.".

"……Shin, it can be said to be extremely difficult for you to conquer Kotori……But in this case, you have an extremely large advantage compared to that of Tohka's and Yoshino's."

"Advantage……huh?"

"……Aaah. There's a simple reason why. She is different from the spirits that suddenly appeared from nowhere, the target for our conquest is one who has been with you and us for an extremely long time. Her hobbies, things that she likes, the places that she frequents, the objects that she wants……etc etc. The information that we have on hand is incomparable to that of other spirits. ……Also, there is still one day left, the time to construct our battle plan has also been decided. We can't make use of it well if you don't attend."

"Y, you're right."

It was right when she said it. It was true that the difficulty of conquering Kotori in commander mode can be said to be unfathomable, however if you only look at the personal information on hand, it was indeed incomparable. On various levels, she could be said to be the easiest target to attack.

"Therefore, I've gathered the crew members who understood what happened to Kotori and we are going to engage in a discussion for the date two days later, Shin you have to join us."

That was obvious. Shidou vigorously nodded his head.

"I understand. If I can contribute, please let me help as well."

"Thanks for your help. ——Then <Fraxinus> will pick you up. May I ask that you return home first?"

"Yes, I understand. ——Ah, Reine."

"……Uh? Is something the matter?"

"I just……would like to ask, even though it was five years ago. Kotori she——"

"……Kotori she?"

Reine asked back. It's just that, Shidou once again reflected on the words said earlier. It could be because he did not think it

through about the things that he wanted to ask——Or perhaps he was hesitant to ask Reine, Kotori's subordinate and friend about such an accusation.

"......No, it's nothing."

"......? Is that so. Then, I'll see you later."

Saying that, Reine hung up. Shidou wordlessly pressed the button and placed his handphone back into his pocket, walking forward with heavy footsteps.

"shidou!"

Shidou used <Fraxinus>'s transfer unit to move into the ship's interior, and there Reine stood as well as Tohka, who probably had not changed her clothes yet and was waiting while wearing the same military uniform as Reine.

"I, isn't this Tohka. You're awa——"

Not waiting for Shidou to finish his sentence, Tohka immediately pounced onto him.

"U, uwa!"

Surprised by the sudden action, his whole body stiffened. Tohka did not seem to mind at all as she wrapped her arms around Shidou's neck and tightly squeezed.

"Nuu! shidou! You were alright! That's great!"

"Uu……it's all thanks to you."

Bitterly smiling as he lightly tapped her shoulders, indicating that it was about time to let go. Tohka, "Uuh", softly muttering, realizing Shidou's intentions and was about to leave——

"……Uu?"

When she felt something suspicious as she frowned and once again brought her face near Shidou's neck.

As though trying to detect a scent, her nose did not stop sniffing .

"Wh, what's wrong? Is something the matter Tohka?"

"No……It's just that there was an unpleasant smell. I wonder why……It should be a smell that is pleasant to the nose, but when

I smelled it, it made me feel sick, or maybe angry would be a better word for it……Aaah, that's right, it is almost the same as Tobiichi Origami's smell."

Tohka said that with a straight face. What an amazing sense of smell. Shidou's heart was about to jump right out.

"——! Is, isisisisisn't that just your imagination……?"

"Uu……is that so. It should be. The fact that Shidou's body had Tobiichi Origami's smell, why did I think about that. Unless Shidou had carried that girl, that smell would never be left on you. "

"……! Th, that's right. That kind of thing would never happen."

"……That's enough with the small talk, Shin."

And then, Reine who had been in a corner looking at Shidou and Tohka, slowly shook her head as she spoke. Looking as sleepy as always, she gave off a feeling like she would fall asleep at any moment.

"Ah……Yes, I'm sorry."

"……Mm, then follow me. Tohka, can you please play with Yoshino for a while?"

"Uu? Can't I stay with shidou?"

Tohka's eyebrows were knitted into a "八" as she stared at Shidou and his chest felt like it was being squeezed——but since it

was a strategy meeting on conquering Kotori, it would be best if Tohka didn't know about this.

"Tohka, sorry. I have something to take care of."

"Uuu……I understand."

Although Tohka pouted her lips, but she still obediently left.

"……Alright, then let's go."

Saying that, Reine shakily started walking. Shidou hastily ran after her silhouette.

Passing through corridors that he had never walked before, they finally arrived in front of a massive door. As Reine stood in front of the door, a beeping sound sounded out and the large door opened by itself.

"……Then, go right in."

There was a wide space inside. The centre of the room was furnished with a large round table and quite a number of crew members had already been seated. Looks like this place was used for strategy meetings.

"……Let's look for an empty seat."

Reine shakily walked into the house, sitting down inside an empty seat. Shidou mimicked Reine and sat down beside her. Looking to his side, there was a mini crystal display and keypad. Looks like every seat have been installed with those facilities.

And then, the man sitting at the head seat made a cough and immediately stood up.

Long hair reaching his back, a face that was not as deep-set as that of a Japanese. It was a man that one would normally find in the books of Shoujo manga.

Kannazuki Kyouhei. He was the Vice-commander of the airship <Fraxinus> and at the same time he was also the vice-commander of the active battle division. Now that Kotori was currently in a quarantined area, he was effectively the next-in-command.

"It's great to have you all gathered here, everyone. Due to the urgency of events, please let me take the place of the Commander, I, Kannazuki will be hosting this meeting. ——Shidou-kun, it is indeed an honor to have your presence here."

"No, this is what I'm supposed to do."

Shidou nodded his head and Kannazuki continued with a satisfied smile.

"Well then, let's get straight into the main topic. Those who had already known about the Commander's body, those who only found out after this incident……No matter which one you are, please lend us your assistance. ——Today's topic is the date plan between Commander Itsuka and Shidou-kun that is in two days time. Please reveal all information that you hold and let us make that day an enjoyable one for our Commander."

Saying that Kannazuki surveyed the crew members who were gathered in the room——and took a deep breath.

"……Shin. It might be better if you covered your ears."

"Eh?"

Reine suddenly said this line, Shidou tilted his head in question. And then——

"Well then, everyone. Dear members of <Ratatoskr>. This is an important event for the goddess whom we all love. Now is the time that we repay her kindness. Commander! Commander Itsuka Kotori! Our support is extremely vital! Do you all have what it takes!?"

"OOH!"

After Kannazuki's declaration, the crew members around the round table replied with a roar. Their terrifying shouts shook the air, the soundwaves reflected off the walls of the room and hammered Shidou's ear drums.

"Wh, what is going on!?"

It looks like he did not notice Shidou's situation, Kannazuki continued to speak.

"Do you wish to be rewarded by our Commander!?"

"OOH!"

"Do you wish to see our Commander's smile!?"

"OOH!"

"Do you wish to crawl on the floor and have the Commander kick you hard with the heel of her boot!?"

"Oo…..eh?"

Looks like that did not gain approval. Kannazuki made a fake cough.

"Now is the time! It's time for us to show our love! Sing it out aloud, that name we all revere!"

"KO.TO.RI!!

KO.TO.RI!!

LO.V.E.KO.TO.RI!!"

The briefing room went into fever. This was not an order and reply, it was more like that of an idol's performance.

"Very good! Well then let's begin with the report! Our Commander's wish, our Commander's hopes, in order to achieve all of that, we must let our Commander fall in love!"

"Understood!"

Replying to Kannazuki's voice, the crew members manipulated the controls at their side and began to input all of their data.

Shidou shook his head from side to side as his ears were still ringing.

"Wh, what just happened…..that."

"……Well, because. Everyone likes Kotori a lot."

"Haa……"

Shidou said as perspiration started to appear on his face, when suddenly a sound was heard from the other side of the round table . It was from a thin man with streaks of white mixed into his hair. His name seems to be——<President> Mikimoto.

"Vice-commander! I'll go first!"

"Very well, I grant you permission to speak!"

"Yes! It has to be a present above all else! As long as we know about the stuff that she likes, it would be easier to gain her favor compared to the usual spirits! We all know that the Commander's favorite are Chupa Chups! If we are able to make a Chupa Chups with an original flavor and present it to the Commander——!"

"NON! Too naïve! At that level of knowledge, do you really think that would possibly be more than the Commander's love for Chupa Chups!? Engrave it in your heart! The thing that the other party loves the most, is the one that is the hardest to give!"

"……! I, I'm really sorry!"

"Next!"

"Yes!"

Complying with Kannazuki's orders, the next crew member stood up. His significant feature was his round glasses, it was <Person Who Surpasses The Dimensions> Nakatsugawa.

"From the Commander's middle school friend, I've already gotten information from Kiotome Kana-chan, it seems that recently the Commander has become attached to the Mister Pig game on the handphone――"

"Wait a second, where on earth did you get that information!"

Shidou involuntarily shouted out while Nakatsugawa revealed a wide smile on his face as he gave a thumbs up.

"Rest assured. I've given her sufficient hush money for this, I didn't reveal anything about <Ratatoskr>, I've properly acted out the role of [a perverted stalker that was harassing Kotori-chan]!"

"What exactly is going on!?"

"Haa……Haa……Hey, little girl, the person that was with you was your friend right……? I, I will give you money, so can you tell me more about her……?"

"This is the wooorrrrssstt! Then again is that Kana-chan really that kind of person who will betray her friends for money?!"

"It seems that her mother is gravely ill, she needs money no matter what. After much deliberation she finally made her determination to do so. But then later she hugged her pillow and cried out of guilt."

"Sorry Kana-chan I had no idea!!"

Shidou grabbed his head, the next middle-aged man——
Bad Marriage
<Tired Too Early> Kawagoe stood up from his seat.

"Vice-commander, it's my turn."

"Very well, I'm looking forward to it."

"Yes. ——First of all please take a look at this. It's an image from May 2nd."

After that, Kawagoe pressed the controls near his hand. And after that the screen at the centre of the table revealed an image of the bridge of the airship.

In the commander's seat, Kotori was seated there. It looks like work had just ended. Kotori, "Uu……", lightly stretched, using her hands to rub her shoulders and spoke.

"……Phew, how tiring. It would be great if I can go to the hot springs to relax once in a while."

"……!"

That scene made every crew member who had gathered in the room raise an uproar.

"She, she said……hot springs……"

"Yes. The Commander is indeed interested in going. ——And I have a proposal to make here."

The same time he spoke, the image on the screen changed to that of a traditional hot springs inn.

"Granting you the peace that you have always been wishing for. Refreshing you in both body and soul, rest that is full of freedom! Tsukimihara Hot Springs Four Days Three Nights Tour! Using the natural hot springs, let us help the Commander relax her shoulders and feel free!"

"S, so that's it……!"

"And, that's not all. This hot spring, when the time is right——mixed bathing is allowed!"

"Wha……"

Once more, all crew members trembled. Kawagoe extended his two hands outwards with a terrifying aura.

"The results of my investigations, the last time the Commander and Shidou-kun had bathed together was already five years ago!"

"Ho, how do you guys even know about that……!"

Despite Shidou's yells, they were beautifully ignored. Kawagoe continued to speak with burning passion.

"Even though they do not have the awareness of being siblings of the opposite gender, Shidou-kun would naturally be attracted to his sister's sudden growth, same goes for the Commander, she would start to have a peculiar interest in her brother's body……! Their rationality losing out to their heightened emotions. The skin of the two unintentionally making contact as they realized each other's existence……! Of course, this scene will definitely be recorded with a higher quality than the ones taken everyday."

"Oh, oooh……"

The crew started to get excited. Although there were a few female members inside, but for some reason they were already hyped up as though they too were excited. It was just like, that was the original intention for the meeting.

"Welcoming the final night. The happy moments were finally coming to an end. At this moment, the Commander finally mustered her courage and speaks. '……Hmph, it's okay for us to sleep together for tonight.'."

"……! ……!"

The crew members looked uncomfortable as they fidgeted.

"Not knowing which party took the initiative to hold hands, unknowingly their bodies stuck close to one another. And finally the lips that finally touched! Aaah, that is something to be celebrated! Commander! This is something that we must celebrate ……!"

Kawagoe used his hand to cover his two eyes. Upon a closer look it looks like he was crying. No, it wasn't just Kawagoe. All of the crew besides Reine, everyone looked extremely touched as tears appeared in their eyes.

"Shidou-kun……We leave the Commander in your care……"

"I beg of you, you must let her find happiness."

"Uwawa……"

Being stared at by multiple tear-streaked faces, while feeling uncomfortable, Shidou scratched his face.

"No, but, even if you all put it that way……"

"! What a wuss! Can you even call yourself a man!?"

"That's right! Please bear responsibility!"

"I will never give the Commander to some guy like you!"

It somehow feels like everyone has become Kotori's father. He showed a troubled expression as he pressed his hand on his forehead.

"Ahh but, his plan is excellent! I'll grant you a Sacred Kotori (Saint Kotori) Medal!"

"I will treasure it!"

Kawagoe used his fist to hit his palm, bowing in respect. Shidou looked at him, turning to speak to Reine who was sitting beside him.

"May I ask, what exactly is a Sacred Kotori (Saint Kotori) Medal?"

"……Badges with Kotori's photo in them made by Kannazuki."

"……Is that so."

How to put it, it was really a medal that does not need to be treasured so badly.

And then, towards the crew members that have more or less decided on the plan, Reine voiced out.

"……However, we would go over Kotori's limit if it is four days and three nights."

"……Ah."

The crew members all widened their mouths in a daze, looking at each other.

A troubled expression appeared on their faces.

"U, uwu……It does indeed seems like that is the case. Can't we just shorten the time period?"

"We can't! This plan's crux is to unconsciously minimize the distance between the two people for the first two days, using the final night as the trigger……!"

"……Furthermore, Kotori's actions on the final night in your plan seem to be that of your personal wish."

"Ah……!"

After having that pointed out by Reine, everyone held their breath.

"Uu——Then what should we do……"

Kannazuki painfully moaned. Looking at him, Reine lightly sighed.

"……Well, I believe that there's no need for it to be so complicated."

"Then, what you are saying is?"

"……You're right. Shin, did Kotori ever mention to you of anywhere she wanted to go?"

"Places that she wanted to go…...huh."

"……Aaah. Places that you did not coincidentally hear from her or rumors if possible, I hope that it was at a time and place where

Shidou is aware that Kotori is speaking to you. Directly to Shidou, specifically saying that she wishes to go together with you, that would be best."

"Al, alright……"

Shidou supported his chin using his hand. If it was a place that Kotori hoped to go together with Shidou——

"That……ah, I got it. Speaking of which, she did mention it before while watching a commercial that she wished we could go to the Ocean Park in Eibu……"

"……Nn, is that so. Then why don't we choose that place?"

Reine used a light tone to speak while nodding.

"Is, is that okay? When Kotori said that, she wasn't in commander mode but in imouto mode you know?"

"……It does not matter. It's not like she really has another personality like Yoshino. Isn't it better if we put it this way, that she was in a state where she freely expresses her feelings?"

"Yes……"

However, Kannazuki frowned as though he was in pain.

"Ocean Park……huh. Well for a date location it is indeed a good choice, but if we decide on it without a concrete plan……"

The rest of the crew members seem to have the same opinion as Kannazuki. Everyone looked reluctant as their mouths bent into a "へ" shape.

"……But we would be able to see Kotori's cute swimsuit if we choose the Ocean Park."

"……"

Just one sentence from Reine, the sounds of everyone holding their breaths could be heard.

……The date plan that had Kotori and <Ratatoskr>'s fates as the stakes, was coincidentally and simply decided just like that.

Chapter 8: Swimwear Battle

The next day, 21st of June, Wednesday.

It was not a break that was granted due to a holiday…… However the Raizen Independent High School that Shidou attends had to take care of issues and suspended lessons for today. Well, it was something that could not be helped. That's because the students and staff of the school had all collapsed, temporarily entering a state of unconsciousness.

It was fortunate that there were no students in critical condition, but due to the school conducting a thorough check in various factors, they decided to temporarily close the school.

"……Well, I guess this counts as a blessing within a disaster."

"……Well then, it is going to be 10am already. Yoshino has already been transferred to the apartment's roof from here. She'll arrive at your location soon I guess."

Shidou sighed after locking up the door. At the same time, Reine's sleepy voice rang in Shidou's right ear.

However, Reine's figure was nowhere to be seen. There was only the miniature communicator in Shidou's right ear.

That's right. Today, Shidou will practice for the date with Kotori tomorrow.

"Well then, what is the training for today? I still don't know what I am supposed to do……"

Shidou lightly tapped his right ear and asked. Shidou was only requested to meet outside their houses with Tohka and Yoshino.

"……Aaah. After meeting with Tohka and Yoshino, go to Tenguu station. The destination is Gemini Building's B block fourth floor. ……Over there, please help the two of them pick their swimsuits."

"Swim, swimsuits……!?"

Frowning. His eyes naturally turned to the right——the direction of the voice. Tohka and Yoshino's swimsuits. The moment he heard that line, his cheeks started to burn.

"……Right, swimsuits. I've already given you money yesterday right? That amount should be sufficient."

"No, al, although what you said is not wrong……but why swimsuits?"

"……Shin. Tomorrow, you are going to the Ocean Park with Kotori correct? In order for you to stay calm on the day itself, it is essential that you have to get used to female swimsuits."

Reine said it as though it was obvious. Shidou narrowed his eyes and scratched his face.

"……No, Reine? Assuming that I will, but I shouldn't be feeling excited from looking at my sister's swimsuit right……"

"……Perhaps. Well, even though it would be great if it was like that, as expected, no——That's why this training necessary. Kotori is not only the only girl in the Ocean Park. A rare date with you staring at other girls is troubling you know."

"....."

Shidou wanted to retort with "I won't do that!", but in the next few seconds his face started to burn. It was indeed hard to say that without feeling guilty. Ugu……he grit his teeth, sighing as he nodded his head.

"Eh……I understand."

And just like that, the conversation ended and the sound of footsteps could be heard from behind. It should be Tohka or Yoshino who had just walked out of the apartment. Shidou raised his hand and turned around.

"Ooh, good morning——"

Following that, his whole body froze. Standing that was not Tohka or Yoshino, but it was Tobiichi Origami who was wearing a knitted shirt and short skirt that provides a lot of freedom.

"Ori, Origami?"

"……"

Origami wordlessly nodded her head.

"Is something wrong today? Meeting in this kind of place sure is rare——"

Mid-way through his words, Shidou suddenly remembered. Naturally covering his mouth so that Origami would not realize it while softly speaking into the communicator.

"Reine? Don't tell me that this was part of your plans too……?"

"……No, at least I do not have any part in this."

"Is, is that right."

Shidou moved his hand away, scratching his cheek and turning to look at Origami.

"Speaking of which is your body alright? You were still hospitalized yesterday……"

"The wound itself was nothing much. After they did some checks I was allowed to leave the hospital."

"Is that so……then that's great. What about……Mana?"

After Shidou's question, Origami's eyebrows slightly frowned.

"She has yet to regain consciousness. ……If Mana were to wake up, then I would not have to come here. ——However, this is fine as well. It is great that I am able to meet with Shidou."

"Eh, then……"

"shidou!"

"Yoha~, we've kept you waiting~"

Just as Shidou was about to question back, from the apartment that was beside the Itsuka house, voices sounded out. Turning to the direction of the voices, Tohka who was wearing a light-colored halter top and a short skirt as well as Yoshino who was wearing a sundress could be seen standing there.

"Uu?"

However, when Tohka, whom had a wide smile on her face, noticed the girl beside Shidou, her eyebrows deeply furrowed. Following that, her face slowly made a wary expression.

"Tobiichi Origami……! You, why are you here!"

Saying that she hurriedly walked closer, cutting between Shidou and Origami, making, "Grr……", such an intimidating sound.

Only that Origami was not afraid of such intimidation and she just kept staring in Yoshino's direction.

"<Hermit>……? Why are you here?"

"……!"

Yoshino started to quiver in fear. It could be that the previous memories of being hunted down by the AST members were still fresh in her mind, or it could be that she was feeling afraid of Origami's freezing stare.

However, as though trying to protect Yoshino, the puppet in her left hand cut in between them.

"Al~right alright Miss. Please don't bully Yoshino? If you always make a face like that, you're going to have a lot of wrinkles at a young age you know~?"

Origami did not even twitch an eyebrow to that provocation, turning to look back at Shidou.

"What is the meaning of this?"

"Eh, no, this is……"

Shidou became incoherent and his eyes looked all over the place . Now that he thought about it, this was the first time Origami met Yoshino with her powers sealed.

To Origami who is not accepting of Tohka at all, another spirit had appeared at this time. It was obvious that she would feel suspicious. However, there is no way that he can tell her about < Ratatoskr>.

"……How troublesome. Just make something up."

"Then, then what should I do……"

After Shidou, whom had received such instructions from Reine, revealed a troubled expression, Tohka who had been unable to join in their conversation exaggeratedly waved her two arms.

"Do, don't ignore me! You, I'm asking you what are you planning to do!"

Origami looked at Yoshino again before sighing, turning her eyes to look at Tohka.

"——Yatogami Tohka. I have something to ask you."

"What did you say?"

Tohka frowned in surprise. This was an unexpected line even to Shidou. She was definitely intending to ask Tohka why she is looking for Shidou.

"What is it, what do you want to know?"

"Yesterday. Do you still remember the spirit who appeared in the air clad in flames?"

"……!"

The one whose breath was held due to Origami's question was not Tohka who was being questioned but Shidou.

So that's what it was. No wonder he was wondering why she would ask Tohka, whose relationship with her was bad to begin with. It became clear once he thought about it. When Kotori appeared on the roof, there were only Shidou, Origami, Mana, Kurumi and Tohka, making up five people. Locking on to Tohka, who is the last person on the list, was something that could not be avoided.

"Rei, Reine……"

Shidou frowned as he pleaded for help in his communicator.

This is not going as smoothly as planned. Indeed, when Kotori had appeared, Tohka was there as well. The probability of her recognizing Kotori's appearance was extremely high.

"……Please calm down, Shin. It shouldn't be that easy to find out."

"B, but——"

Shidou could hear his own heartbeat accelerating wildly, turning to look at Origami and Tohka.

It should be best to prevent Tohka from saying anything. —— No, doing so would cause Origami to be suspicious. No, if this were to continue then——

Then, just as Shidou was desperately thinking of a way out, Tohka crossed her arms and spoke.

"Hmph, even if I know anything I wouldn't even tell you!"

Saying that, she went "Hmph——!" and puffed up her cheeks.

Shidou let out a sigh. ……The bad relationship between the two seemed to have displayed its usefulness in this kind of situation.

"……"

However, this issue wasn't resolved just like that. Origami remained silent, and standing there, she quietly took a step backwards, lowering her head.

"I beg of you."

"Wha……"

The unexpected development caused Shidou's eyes to widen in surprise. That Origami, actually lowered her head to Tohka.

Tohka seemed to have the same reaction as Shidou. Widening her eyes in shock, her head frantically moved with an expression of being unable to stay calm.

"No, don't do this! Wh, what is your motive!"

"Please tell me what you know about the spirit of flames. Please ."

"I, I got it already! I got it already so raise your head. It's uncomfortable."

Tohka yelled out like that, Origami quickly raised her head.

"Then……"

"Uuh……The spirit of flames right. I have seen her."

As expected, Tohka did see Kotori's figure. Tohka's words made Shidou's body tense up in a panic. ——However.

"That is……That is, uwu, crimson."

Origami wordlessly looked at Tohka.

"——And then?"

"Uu? And then……that's right, she was strong!"

"Is that all?"

"Uu. That is……She gave the 'Uwa!' feeling!"

"……"

Origami once again fell into silence before opening her mouth once more.

"How useless."

"You, what did you say!? I took the trouble of answering you, what kind of attitude is this!"

"To think that my expectation of you was that of my fingernail, I was really foolish. It would be more valuable to view the images and sound recordings instead."

"How horrible of you, since you said it like that……!"

"Al, alright alright, calm down."

Shidou heaved a sigh of relief, tapping Tohka's shoulders.

Although Tohka looked furious, she still listened to Shidou, pouting as she calmed down.

"——Then again, what are you people doing?"

And then, Origami looked at Shidou, Tohka and finally Yoshino as she spoke.

"Hmph, who would tell you that we are planning to go and buy our swimsuits with Shidou!"

"Buying swimsuits?"

Origami's eyes turned to look back at Shidou.

"No, well, that……is how it is."

"Is that so."

Saying that, Origami suddenly turned around and walked off. Just like that, in the way that she came from.

But, she stopped walking after a few steps, making a clap on purpose.

"Speaking of which, I only have a swimsuit given by the school."

Saying that, she held her hand to her forehead, exaggeratedly shaking her head.

"If this goes on, when I go to the pool or the beach, it would be troubling."

Shidou did not say anything, Origami turned her head back.

"It would be troubling."

"……That's."

Shidou scratched his face due to being thrown into an extremely troublesome situation, Reine's calm voice sounded out.

"……Shin. There's no other way. Invite her along as well."

"Is, is that okay……? That, Tohka and Yoshino."

"……It's not that it can't be helped. Even if you do ignore her, she will follow us eventually. Also, having more girls as specimens isn't a bad thing."

"Guh……"

It was a scene that could be easily imagined, Shidou's face started to perspire as he bitterly smiled.

Making a big sigh, he turned to face Origami who was still making those obvious actions.

"If it's alright with you, you can come along too, Origami."

"I'll go."

"Wha——!"

The same time Origami nodded, Tohka looked shaken as though she suffered a big shock.

"Wh, why shidou! Today was supposed to be just shopping with shidou, Yoshino, [Yoshinon] and me! Why must Tobiichi Origami come along too!"

"Al, alright, don't be mad. She seems to be troubled by that."

"Guu……Then I'll ignore her."

Tohka grit her teeth with an expression as though she could not accept the situation.

Thus, Origami did not mind her at all as she nodded her head.

"Since you dislike me so much then it can't be helped. Then I won't go with you."

"! Wh, what did you say?"

Getting a fright due to the lack of her resistance, Tohka's face had a look of surprise.

And then, Origami moved closer to Shidou with light footsteps, wrapping her arm around Shidou's and planning to walk off just like that. Tohka showed an expression of utter shock as she could not immediately register what was going on.

"W, wait a moment! What are you doing!"

"I am going to buy my swimsuit with Shidou. You can go with <Hermit>."

"Wh, why did it turn out like this!"

"You've said it, that you dislike being with me right. So this can 't be helped."

"Wh……Just because of that! I didn't mean it that way——"

Midway through Tohka's words, Origami put more force into her pulls. Because of the sudden force, Shidou was dragged a few steps just like that.

"shidou! Dammit——Let go already!"

"But, if it's like that you will only have to go shopping with me. "

"Is, is that so……!?"

“That’s right. This is something that can’t be helped.”

Making a troubled voice, Origami confidently nodded her head. A while later Tohka, "Guh.....", nodded her head while speaking with a tinge of remorse.

"I, I understand, I am fine going shopping with the likes of you. Now get away from shidou!"

"Is that so. But I don't want to."

"——!?"

Tohka's face took on an expression of surprise.

"If you want to go together, then beg me."

"Wha.....Wha....."

Tohka looked at Shidou and Origami, not understanding why things turned out like this.

"It's alright if you can't do it. As long as Shidou and I are together, nothing else matters."

"P, please wait! I, I beg you! Please let me go with you!"

Looking at Shidou who was having his arm tightly held by Origami, Tohka cried out loud. Origami lessened the force she put into her grip, slowly looking at Tohka. Following that, she spoke in a gentle voice.

"No."

"Wha.....!"

Tohka widened her eyes in shock, with an expression as though she would burst into tears at any moment.

".....Hey."

Unable to watch any longer, Shidou narrowed his eyes and sighed.

In the end, Origami tagged along with them. Throughout the trip, the relationship between Tohka and Origami had become extremely perilous——Well but this was no different from how they usually act in school. Entering the elevator of the Gemini Building's B block in front of Tenguu Station, he pressed the button leading to their destination.

Due to the fact that there usually aren't many customers in the afternoon, the ones riding in the elevator were only Shidou and the others.

"Speaking of which, shidou."

And then, as the elevator started its sounds of movement, Tohka suddenly inclined her head.

"Uh? What is it?"

"What is it, swimsuits?"

"Eh?"

Shidou widened his eyes as he asked back. But then again, the gym lessons at school still had not conducted any swimming lessons. It was understandable that Tohka did not know anything at all.

Although that was the case, it was rather embarrassing to explain it to a girl. Shidou avoided her gaze as he spoke.

"Um……That's right, a swimsuit is——"

"——Mi-Zu-Gi. It is one of the latest weapon models for anti-spirit use. Activated at the same time as the Realizer that it is equipped with, the bullet tips are disintegrated to the size of atoms , shooting out and penetrating the Astral Dress with ease, the opponent's body cells will suffer an immense level of damage that is impossible to recover from. The pain suffered is indescribable, due to it being too inhumane, international laws have banned it from being used on humans."

And then, Origami said random things to mess up the truth. Tohka held her breath in shock.

"Wh……is, is that true shidou……!?"

"No, how can that be……"

Shidou tried to correct Tohka's misunderstanding, however he was once again interrupted by Origami.

"It's true. I never thought that he knew, about the existence of the swimsuit."

"Wh, why does shidou want to buy such a thing……"

"There is a simple reason to it. An anti-spirit military suit that is only used against spirits. He must be planning to make a surprise attack when you two let your guard down."

"……"

Tohka's face turned pale and stiffened while Yoshino who was hiding behind Shidou's back to avoid Origami also held her breath .

"Do, don't lie! How can shidou do such a thing!"

"……, I think……so too, that can't be, right……"

Tohka shouted out and even Yoshino who was normally silent voiced out.

"Is, isn't that right, shidou?"

Just as Shidou was about to nod his head and agree, Origami held her nose, speaking up.

"No, it's just like Origami said. I've always been planning to kill you two——"

"Do, don't tell me shidou, you're really……!?"

"That's not right, she doesn't sound like me at all, you are being deceived!"

Shidou cried out while Tohka looked shaken as though she was shocked. Looks like she finally realized that she had been taken for a ride. Her face flushed red from rage and embarrassment, and she started furiously gnashing her teeth.

"Damn you, despicable Tobiichi Origami! How dare you deceive me!"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"……The two of you, please quiet down when you go into the store."

Shidou stepped in and stopped the two girls from quarreling, letting out a sigh. Although it was a common occurrence, bothersome issues still remain as bothersome as ever.

"A swimsuit is like what it is called, it is clothing that you wear when you go swimming."

Shidou gave a simple explanation, Tohka finally withdrew her animosity towards Origami, tilting her head in wonder.

"Swimsuit…..? We have to change clothes just because of this?"

"Aaah. It's uncomfortable to wear wet clothes that cling on to your body right?"

"Oooh, so that's why! shidou, are you a genius?"

"That's not it, since I'm not the one that thought of it in the first place."

Scratching his cheek, he bitterly smiled.

Leaving the elevator, what entered their vision were rows upon rows of swimsuits. It was already late June. It must be the best time for the store to sell swimsuits at this period.

"……Well then, though it took some time, we're starting soon. Please choose an appropriate one."

And then, Reine who has stayed silent the whole time, suddenly spoke.

"……I'll leave the choice to you, but please don't panic over their charming figures. What's important is that you must remain calm."

"……I understand."

Shidou said that as he stepped into the swimsuit store with Tohka and the others. "Welcome——", The sales assistants' voice rang out.

The first one to run up was Tohka. She looked around the store with an air of curiosity, tilting her head.

"Then, shidou. Where are the swimsuits that you spoke about?"

"Uh, all of the ones displayed here are swimsuits."

"! Wh, what did you say……?"

As Shidou finished his words, Tohka widened her eyes as her two hands trembled.

Tohka hesitantly took a one piece swimsuit for a closer look, stroking it as though ascertaining its fabric quality, suddenly raising her head as though she realized something.

"I see, so that's how it is. Then what do you wear over it?"

"No……Just that."

As Shidou scratched the back of his head and replied, Tohka looked over with a wary expression.

"Th, this can't cover the body at all! Why is the surface area so small……!?"

"No, well……because that makes it easier to move around doesn't it?"

"Uu, uu……even though what you say may be true, but doing it like so, won't it be like the tights that Tobiichi Origami has……It's kind of embarrassing."

"……"

Tohka's words made Origami's gaze turn dark. Although nothing was said, but there was an unhappy feeling coming from her.

"……Well, first of all please get them to try some out."

Reine said as such through the earphone. Shidou tapped it lightly to acknowledge, speaking to the three of them.

"Al, alright……first of all please pick your favorite one and try it on."

Origami immediately nodded and agreed while Yoshino nodded embarrassedly. Looking at the two of them, Tohka's face blushed as well, opening her mouth to say "……just this once."

Clenching her fists, she turned to Yoshino in a battle ready stance.

"Alright……it's win or lose, Yoshino!"

"Th, that is……please……go easy on me."

Looking at the conversation between the two, Shidou tilted his head in confusion.

"Win or lose……what does that mean?"

"Um. Today whoever makes shidou's heart beat the fastest between Yoshino and I will be entitled to have a date with Shidou. "

"Wh……!?"

Shidou widened his eyes as he tapped the earphone. Immediately, he heard the sleepy voice of Reine sound out.

"……Uh, anyway I've only slightly increased the difficulty."

"Ho, how is this——"

"Speaking of which shidou!"

And then, Tohka suddenly made a sound, cutting off the conversation between Shidou and Reine.

"Wh……what is it, Tohka?"

"shidou, what must you do so that your heart would beat faster ? Is it running? Do you have to run far?"

"……That will, nn, definitely make my heart beat faster."

Shidou's face had a few beads of sweat as he smiled bitterly. Indeed, doing that would undoubtedly make his heart beat faster.

However, at this point [Yoshinon] on Yoshino's left hand made a chuckle.

"Aah~haha, that's not correct~. In order to make the heart of a boy race, there's only one way."

"Uu? What must I do?"

"Um~, Well, although I don't wish to aid Yoshino's opponent, but winning against someone who doesn't know a thing is not fun at all~. Alright alright Tohka-chan. Come here for a second." Saying that, [Yoshinon] waved its hand. After Tohka walked closer , using a voice inaudible to Shidou, it seems like it whispered something to her. Following that,

"Wha……!?"

At the same time the conversation ended, Tohka's face *Pom!* turned red.

"Well, although it's a given that Yoshino will win, but please do try your best~"

[Yoshinon] pulled Yoshino into the interior of the store. Tohka saw them off with a dazed expression.

"Hey, hey, Tohka……? What exactly did——"

"Hyau!"

After Shidou placed his hand on her shoulder, Tohka's body trembled as she made a weird cry.

"Toh, Tohka?"

"Uu……No, I'm sorry. It's nothing. But……like this, it's a little troubling. shidou's heart won't race if I don't do that huh……"

"That's not it, tell me what you heard just now!"

After that, Shidou yelled out, and Origami silently emerged from behind him.

"——I've grasped the rules. The right to date Shidou is mine."

"Wha……! Th, that has nothing to do with you isn't it!"

Tohka stared hard at Origami with a straight face. However Origami did not mind at all, selecting a few swimsuits and walking into the fitting room.

"Gu……I, only her, I definitely won't hand over the right to date to her……!"

Tohka tightly held her fists, taking the swimsuit by her hand and walking into the fitting room beside Origami's.

"……That's……"

It somehow feels like everything had already been decided. Shidou scratched his cheek while looking troubled.

Looking in Yoshino's direction, it looks like she still hasn't decided on a suitable swimsuit. It seems that Yoshino wishes to try on a one piece, but [Yoshinon] kept encouraging her to try on sexy swimsuits that boast of a high degree of exposure.

After looking at that, the curtain of the fitting room that Tohka just walked into was forcefully pushed aside.

“shidou!”

Saying that, Tohka, who was wearing a one piece, shyly revealed her figure.

“Oh, oooh……”

Shidou couldn’t help but widen both eyes. Tohka was a real beauty, having outstanding proportions without a doubt. However, the chance for him to view her from her head to her toes was extremely rare. The swimsuit itself had an extremely simple design. But it was due to this fact that further emphasized Tohka’s undeniable beauty, furiously stimulating his heart.

“H, how is it, shidou! Did your heart race just now?”

“Eh——ah, that……nn.”

“Is that so! Since shidou already put it like that……Nn, I’ll work harder!”

Saying that, Tohka showed a slight smile of happiness. As such, seeming to have detected Shidou's heart rate, his right ear heard an alarm that he had gotten used to hearing.

"……Out. Calm down for a second, Shin."

"Ah——"

After being pointed out by Reine for the first time, Shidou finally realized that he was blankly staring at Tohka's figure. He dazedly heard Reine sigh.

"……No matter the reason, since you failed then you must accept the punishment."

Punishment. This ominous phrase, made Shidou's back experience a chill.

"W, we are still going on with that……!? Wh……what exactly is ……"

When Kotori was still around, the punishments were always mortifying to the extent that he felt that he cannot get a bride anymore.

Shidou had been constantly hurt like that. Naturally, he put on his guard.

However Reine kept quiet for a while, seeming to be talking about something with the crew members of <Fraxinus> at the other side of the earphone. After that, a few seconds later.

"……What should we do then."

She said that sentence. He involuntarily gave a dry laugh.

"D, didn't you think about it?"

"……Uh, I'm not the same as Kotori, I didn't grasp your weaknesses……"

That was obvious. If his weaknesses had been grasped then Shidou would really have a reason to cry. Even if he was a boy.

Reine was in deep thought, a few seconds later, she made a sound as though she had just thought of something.

"……Alright, we'll do it this way then. After Kotori's power as a spirit is sealed, you will sneak into Kotori's bed at night and kiss her on the cheek, saying 'Sweet dreams, My. Sweet. Sister.'."

"Aa——aah!?"

The unexpected punishment game made Shidou yell in anguish .

"……From today onwards when we are in a situation where Kotori is absent, we can also release the video recording as a punishment. ……Well then, please do your best. Every time you are out, the scenarios are just going to pile up."

However Reine seems like she is not going to accept Shidou's protests. Shidou pressed his forehead with a heart full of despair.

After that, while Shidou was in the midst of thought, the curtain beside Tohka's opened.

"……!" Looking at that figure, he couldn't speak for a while.

Origami's slender figure was being wrapped by a halter-top bikini. Due to the swimsuit being a darker color, it caused Origami 's white skin to be further emphasized, especially the thighs and collarbone that was usually hidden under the clothes, even the belly button was revealed. Furthermore, her hair was tied in a bunch to match her swimsuit, making her difficult not to look at. Shidou felt his cheeks naturally heating up.

"Shidou, how is this?"

"……! Eh, aa, aaah……I think it fits you……very, well."

"Is that so?"

Origami remained motionless, but she nodded her head as though she was glad, stepping out of the fitting room while barefooted, she spun around once in front of Shidou.

That look really causes one's heart to race. As such, for the second time, an alarm rang in Shidou's ear.

"……Aside from the good night kiss, you will also have to accompany her to sleep."

"——! Oh, crap!"

He couldn't help but waver, but it was too late. He was already out with another despairing punishment game.

"Gu, uuuuuu……"

Shidou, at this moment, noticed that Tohka was making a low growl. Directing a sharp glare towards Shidou and Origami, she grit her teeth in regret.

"shidou! Bring that swimsuit over!"

"Eh……?"

What Tohka was pointing at, was a bikini that was hung near Shidou. When compared to the swimsuit that Tohka was currently wearing, it was a sexy design that was four times as revealing.

"Th, this one? But Tohka, won't you be embarrass——"

"Just, hurry up and hand it over to me!"

Being ordered by Tohka, Shidou had no other choice but to hand the swimsuit over. Tohka snatched it over as though she was attempting to tear it apart, closing the curtain. Subsequently, after a chaotic sound came out from behind the curtain——

"H, how is this one!"

The next moment the curtain opened, Tohka's figure appeared once more with a totally different impression from the previous one.

Wearing the daring bikini that Shidou had just passed her, her cheeks were tinged red, using her hands to cover her thighs and belly button——however her hands kept fidgeting with an expression of being totally unable to calm down.

"This, this is……"

Shidou couldn't help but gulp. Although the swimsuit that Origami wore just now was extremely eye catching, but Tohka's present look had a different kind of charm. The black bikini and Tohka's healthy figure complemented each other. Furthermore, Tohka's shame of not being used to exposing her skin to this extent had also contributed to her appearance. To be honest, it was unbearable.

"……Well then, let's add on with a good morning kiss."

"Ah——"

Reine's voice entered his right ear, causing Shidou's body to tremble. Due to being entranced by Tohka's seductive appearance. He was out before he could even talk back.

"shidou, this, does this look good on me……?"

Tohka fidgeted as she questioned him. Shidou nodded his head in reply.

"Tha, is that so!"

"……"

However, Origami at this moment also had her fighting spirit riled up. Wordlessly walking inside the fitting room.

Not long later the curtain opened, standing over there was Origami's figure that had already changed back into her casual clothing. If she had wanted to compete with Tohka, shouldn't she change into a swimsuit that had a much larger skin exposure compared to Tohka's……!? For Shidou who had mentally prepared himself, it was an unexpected move.

It looks like Tohka had the same thought as Shidou. Looking at Origami's clothing with a face full of surprise, she crossed her arms around her chest and made a sound with her nose.

"Hmph, so you decided to admit defeat. So you do have some common sense after all!"

However Origami ignored Tohka's words, remaining silent as she motioned her hand for Shidou to come over.

"Eh? Wh, what's the matter?"

Shidou, though suspicious, approached Origami, Origami grabbed Shidou's wrist, moving it towards her own skirt.

"Uwa!?"

"Wh, what are you doing, you!"

Shidou wildly cried out, and Tohka too became flustered upon witnessing that scene.

However Origami had a look of utmost calm, silently parting her lips.

"——Lift it up."

""Wha……!?""

Shidou and Tohka's voice perfectly overlapped. Although his right ear seemed to have picked up an alarm, he didn't have the spare time to pay attention to that. Not understanding Origami's actions, his vision started to wander about.

"Wh, what are you talking about Origami. This kind of——"

"That's right you, you are already going against the rules!"

"I've been abiding by the rules. Shidou, raise it up."

"No, tha, that is really……"

Shidou's fingertips trembled as his voice started to become incoherent, Origami's hand that was tightly gripping onto Shidou's increased in strength. Slowly, her skirt was being lifted up.

"Wa, wait a moment, Origami……!?"

Even though he tried to resist, it was futile. Slowly but surely, the forbidden triangle territory was revealed. What was even more depressing was, Shidou too was a male. Even though his vision was all over the place, he couldn't help but peep at the area below the skirt.

Underneath Origami's casual clothes was, a white swimsuit.

"This……! What is this!?"

Tohka cried out in surprise.

"I've said it before. I didn't break any rules."

It seems as though she was very satisfied, Origami sent her gaze towards Tohka.

So that was the case, making use of creativity. Not raising the degree of exposure, on the contrary, raising the degree of concealment.

If that was the case then the destructive power of the swimsuit would explosively increase by multiple times. It was her victory. As expected of Raizen High School's genius. Shidou's overheated brain pondered over this issue in a daze.

"In conclusion, the one that made his heart race the most is me. ——I'll be accepting the right to date him."

"H, how can this be……"

Tohka walked to Shidou's side with an expression of panic, placing her ear onto his chest.

After several seconds of hearing Shidou's heartbeat, she showed an expression of shock.

"Hi, his heartbeat increased……"

Origami calmly flipped her skirt.

"Why don't you just admit defeat already?"

"Gu, gugugugugu……"

Tohka ground her teeth as though regretting something, taking hold of Shidou's right hand that Origami had just let go of.

"Toh, Tohka……?"

Not understanding Tohka's intentions, he widened his two eyes .

Tohka's face turned red and her two hands held Shidou's right hand, saying "Alright" as though she had her determination set on something.

"Yoshinon……I believe in you……!"

Saying that, Shidou's hand was forcefully dragged towards her direction.

"Wha——!"

Shidou exerted force in the nick of time, interrupting her actions .

That was because his hand's destination was——being wrapped in a swimsuit, Tohka's soft breasts.

"Wait, wh, what on earth are you trying to do Tohka! Stop this already!"

"N, no no no……! I want to make your heartbeat faster too, Shidou!"

"Alright alright! It's already beating fast enough!"

"Re, really……?"

Tohka's eyebrows bent into an [八] shape, once again paying close attention to Shidou's heartbeat.

After that, a few seconds later.

"Your heart was beating faster when Tobiichi Origami did it……!"

Crying aloud in despair, Tohka tried to press Shidou's hand onto her own chest once more. Due to her feeling extremely embarrassed, her face was as red as a tomato.

"Wait, wait a minute! Calm down Tohka! You're embarrassed too right!? It's impossible!"

"It, it's okay……! It's fine if it is shidou! You've already touched them before right!?"

"What is the meaning of this? I hope you can explain it in closer detail."

"Don't just concentrate on that fact alone, why don't you stop heeerrr!"

And then, as Shidou yelled in despair, the next instant.

"Shidou……sa……n……!"

A sound like a mosquito seemed to have sounded out.

"Eh……?"

Tohka and Origami seemed to have noticed it as well. Suddenly stopping in their tracks, they frowned in surprise.

"Uu……that voice just now was....."

"……"

"It should be……Yoshino."

Shidou concentrated, once again trying to hear that weak voice once more.

"Shi…..dou-san…… P, please…..please……save me……"

It seems that the sound was coming from the third fitting room.

——Save me. The instant he recognized that phrase, Shidou hastily ran over, pulling the curtain open.

"……! Yoshino, is something wrong!? Are you alright!?"

The curtain had been forcibly opened. And then——over there was.

"Shi, Shidou-san……"

Although she was wearing clothes, Yoshino was still remaining in a half naked state, in a situation where the bikini swimwear had just been worn, she was holding on to her chest while crying.

How do you put it, that look. It had an amazing effect when coupled with Yoshino's petite figure, releasing huge amounts of coquettish charm that would cause Shidou to have forbidden sexual tendencies.

"It, it's difficult……to wear it, if I'm only using one hand……"

Yoshino softly said.

By his ear, the most sonorous alarm sound for today rang out.

……That was the instant the winner of the right to date Shidou was announced.

"Haa……Why does today have to be so tiring……"

Reclining on the chair inside the lounge of <Fraxinus>, Shidou heavily sighed. Bringing the paper cup to his mouth, he finished the coffee inside in a single gulp. Although it was a lounge, it was in reality nothing special. There were only a few (free) automated vending machines located in some of the indents of the wall, and in front of the machines were two long benches. It was a simple space that had two tall plants for aesthetics purposes.

Of course there was another dining area that was more comfortable, however Shidou preferred places with less human traffic. ……Especially since today was such a taxing day.

"It's fine if it was just training, but what would I do if I run out of energy before the actual event……"

In the end Shidou bought swimsuits for the three girls as a present, returning home for lunch.

After that Reine called him out to reconfirm about the details of the plan. Midway through he was dragged out for lunch by Tohka and Yoshino, wasting a considerable amount of time.

He was hoping to speak to Kotori at least once, but due to her unstable condition his wish was unable to be granted. Plainly said it was because there was nothing for Shidou to do until tomorrow, thus as a result he was allowed to do as he pleased and therefore he was feeling lost as to what to do.

"……"

He looked at the ceiling in a daze, lightly giving out a sigh.

It was fine up till just now.....it was only halfway through that due to those needless thoughts, it caused himself to become like this.

To describe it in detail would simply be——what he had heard yesterday, his conversation with Origami.

(Five years ago. The one that caused the huge fire at the residential district of Nankou-machi, the spirit who burned my parents to cinders in front of me.——That was, that spirit of flames .)

"Could it.....really be, Kotori.....?"

Kotori. Shidou's little sister, killed Origami's parents.

This sort of thing, is too sudden for him to believe and he too did not wish to believe it to be a fact.

However, he can't believe that that Origami would pull such a prank, that too was the truth.

"So.....what exactly is the truth?"

Attempting to search his memories from five years ago, inside Shidou's brain——that restricted area caused a sharp sensation of pain.

"Uuh....."

That's right. Shidou still had not recalled the entirety of the whole incident.

——What exactly happened five years ago.

——Why does Shidou, or Kotori know about the method to seal the power of the spirits.

No matter what it was, he was unable to recall. It was as though Shidou's memories have been fitted with a strange filter, a horrible feeling.

"Excuse me, do you mind if I sit over here?"

And then, the voice of a male rang out from above him, causing him to jump.

Looking in that direction, it was Kannazuki who was holding a packet drink stood.

"Ah.....please."

After Shidou said those words, Kannazuki gave a light smile and sat down.

"How do you feel, Shidou-kun. Are you confident for tomorrow's events?"

"No, haha.....to be honest, it's impossible to be calm right now. To me, asking me to make that Kotori fall in love is something that is really unthinkable. It was unbelievable that five years ago I was able to seal Kotori's pow——"

Midway through his words, Shidou stopped speaking. Before all that, he had no memories of that at all.

".....? Is something wrong?"

"Aaah.....That, actually....."

Shidou described his inability to recall the events from five years ago to Kannazuki.

"Mhm.....no memories, huh....."

".....Yeah. Only that incident has been obscured. "

"Well, it is as I had expected huh."

"Eh?"

Shidou widened his two eyes, Kannazuki brought the packet drink to his mouth as he replied.

"Well, it was that time when we first said that the Commander was a spirit, your reaction was more surprising than I had thought. If you had remembered the events from five years ago, your reaction would probably have been different."

Kannazuki placed the drink packet on the bench, placing his hand under his chin as though thinking of something.

"Mhm. If it is alright with you, would you want to view a video ?"

"A video.....?"

After questioning with his eyebrows knitted together, Kannazuki nodded his head exaggeratedly.

"That's right. We have the video recording of that huge conflagration at Nankou-machi from five years ago. Although it is only a few minutes long, but the figure of Shidou-kun and the Commander in spirit form was captured."

"......!"

Shidou held his breath, widening his eyes. It was a good thing that he had finished drinking the coffee. If he was still holding onto the packet drink, he would most definitely cause a huge mess on the floor.

"Does that sort of video still exist!?"

"Nn. It seemed to have been captured by chance by a certain television station, <Ratatoskr> had intercepted the master copy before they could release it to the public. ——Are you ready?"

"I, I'm counting on you.....!"

No matter what. Shidou hastily nodded his head in reply.

"Origami!? You should have contacted us sooner, like the moment you were discharged."

After parting ways with Shidou, she went down to visit the CR-Unit hangar inside Tenguu Base before going home. Kusakabe Ryouko, leader of the AST, said such a line to her.

Wearing work pants and a black tank top, she looked as though she was in the middle of moving some supplies and she placed a clipboard under her arm while in her other hand was a pen. Due to the CR-Unit being highly classified equipment, only a few people were allowed access to it. Even an active member such as the AST leader is not spared from these menial chores.

Origami slowly closed her eyes and shook her head.

"I've been on an extremely important mission."

"Important mission? Speaking of which what is that?"

Ryouko raised her eyebrows, pointing to the paper bag that was in Origami's right hand. Origami brought the bag close to her chest , silently opening her mouth.

"This is, a gift that is priceless——At the same time, it is something that has the bitter taste of defeat engraved upon it."

"Ah.....? Wh, what do you mean?"

Ryouko's face twisted in confusion, staring at the paper bag Origami was holding. ——Well, there was only the swimsuit that Shidou had bought for her inside.

"I will never forgive <Hermit>."

"Wait a minute, why are you mentioning <Hermit> here?"

And then, as Ryouko questioned with a bead of sweat rolling down her face, a vehicle with a crude design moved closer while dragging a gigantic piece of equipment.

"Oooh. Alright Origami, you'll have to move back for a while."

Saying that, Ryouko waved at Origami. Origami moved in the direction of her hand.

At this moment, she saw the equipment that was brought in. Wrapped up in protective bubble wrap, it was a massive Unit that could be more than five meters long.

"This is?"

After Origami's question, Ryouko used her pen to write on the clipboard as she answered.

"Uh—, it's a new experimental equipment. DW-029, Destruction Armament <White. Licorice>. two sets of the Large-sized laser blade <CleaveLeaf>, two of the 50.5cm magic cannon <Blastalk>, and eight containment units <RootBox> that can store a large amount of weaponry. It is an unusual Unit that is able to bestow upon a single person with the firepower of a section of the AST."

"....."

Origami wordlessly looked up at that oversized armament.

"If I use this, can I defeat <Efreet>?"

"Haa? What are you talking about. You can't use this. Whether it is authority or the skills that you lack. This is an experimental equipment from D.E.M industries. Well, if we look at it based on theory, it truly is an equipment that is sufficient enough to take down a spirit.....However I heard that even those highly specialized <Wizards> from D.E.M. are rendered into a vegetative state if they use it for thirty minutes at full power. I'd say that you'd better give up on that thought of using it."

".....This kind of equipment, why is it here?"

"Uh, it looks like the higher ups of D.E.M, probably sent it here intending for it to be used by Mana. Well, it's useless if our dear Mana remains in a deep sleep."

"Is that so."

"Then again.....<Efreet> you say? Are you referring to the spirit of flames that appeared five years ago? Why did you mention her name? She has not appeared even once after five years ago since she was identif——"

And suddenly, Ryouko's words were cut off.

Giving Origami an incredulous look, she snapped her fingers as though she recalled something.

"Aaah, that's right. ——So that was <Efreet> huh?"

"....., what do you mean?"

Origami raised her eyebrows slightly, turning her body towards Ryouko. Just like that, she took a step forward, moving closer as though cornering Ryouko. Ryouko seemed to have been shocked by Origami's frightening actions, taking a step backwards and leaning back.

"Wh, why are you doing this suddenly?"

"That doesn't matter, tell me."

"Even if you ask me to tell you.....The day before, when you and Mana were battling <Nightmare>, wasn't it <Efreet>? That spirit of flames?"

"——!"

Origami held her breath, drawing even closer to Ryouko.

"How did you know about the appearance of the spirit of flames ?"

"How.....that's because, I saw the video image....."

"....!"

Widening her eyes. She had never expected that in a place that was so close, she was able to grab a hint on <Efreet>.

"Captain Kusakabe."

"Wh, what is it?"

"I beg of you. Please let me see that image. ——Right now, immediately."

"——That was, really....."

Shidou and Kannazuki went from the resting lounge to the briefing room yesterday where they were holding the strategy meeting yesterday. After that, Kannazuki sat on the same seat as yesterday, manipulating the control system on the round table.

"I'm really sorry, the preparations weren't enough. If we were using the Vice-commander's terminal, the image would be clearer."

"No, I don't mind at all.....But is that video really stored in here?"

"That's not right. The video itself is not stored within <Fraxinus>. It is stored within the database back at our headquarters."

Due to the unfamiliarity of the term Shidou felt somewhat suspicious——However upon deeper thought he found it to be logical. The <Fraxinus> was an airship. Even if it is powered by a Realizer, it was impossible for it to stay in the air all the time.

"However, doesn't that mean that it is fine as long as there is a network connection? Then wouldn't it be fine even if it wasn't in the Vice-commander's room?"

"Well, even though you can put it that way, the image there is larger and it is more suited to view videos in detail.——Oooh, it's appearing. The video."

The same time Kannazuki said so, the screen placed in the middle of the round table started to play the video.

A corner of the street, it was a video that was taken from the sky . Just that the images shown were dotted in crimson, it looked as though it were oilfields or the mouth of a volcano. It was unimaginable that countless people were living there a few hours ago, a purgatory of flames.

From the speakers, the sounds of a helicopter engine could be heard, as well as the male voice of a reporter. From time to time, the sounds of violent explosions were mixed in, causing the images to shake slightly.

"......Uu."

Shidou involuntarily frowned. It was a horrifying scene that was out of his expectations. The conflagration which had occurred where he had stayed, although he did remember that such an incident happened, he didn't expect it to be so bad.

"——Well then, it's almost time."

And then, Kannazuki who had been viewing the image with Shidou spoke with a calm voice.

The helicopter turned around, gradually lowering in altitude. At the same time the image was zoomed in, becoming blurry. After an instant, the focus was readjusted.

"——, That is."

And in the next instant, looking at the object near the edge of the screen, Shidou's throat trembled.

In the heart of the street. It was different from the rest of the place, the house that should have been there was burnt to ashes, in that location that looked like barren ground, a familiar figure can be seen.

It was originally a video from a long time ago, coupled with rough pixelation from the distance, unsteady image from being taken in mid-air and multiple negative factors, it caused the image to be extremely bad. However, Shidou felt that he was not mistaken.

"Kotori....."

That's right. Over there was Kotori wearing her Astral Dress, the same as he had witnessed the day before at Raizen High School .

At her feet, a small shadow collapsed there. Eyebrows locked, he focused on the shaking images.

"That is——me.....?"

And then.

"————Eh?"

Shidou's lungs contracted, making a short and soft sound.

That, was located in front of Shidou and Kotori. No——existing is probably a better word to describe it.

In front of the two, [Something] existed.

To ordinary people, that could be just the noise that appeared in the video.

However, that's not right. That was. That shadow was——

"....."

Instantly, Shidou used his hands to hold his head, kneeling down on the spot.

The instant he saw that, the stabbing pain that had been within Shidou's head expanded, transforming into intense pain and assaulted him.

"Shidou-kun? What's wrong?"

Kannazuki asked. However Shidou did not reply him as he just stared at the image——at the visual noise that was positioned in front of the young Kotori and Shidou and spoke.

"Who——exactly....., are you, you are....."

"By who.....may I ask which one are you talking about?"

"This——one. The one in front of me, and Kotori....."

Kannazuki went into deep thought. Looking at him, Shidou realized for the first time.

——Why, did he treat the noise-like shadow as a person.

At the very least, it was inferred from his use of the word [Who] .

"Ah——"

After thinking about it, the pain assaulting Shidou's head reached its peak——Shidou lost consciousness.

"....."

Origami, who had unreasonably dragged Ryouko who was in the midst of working into the briefing room, looked at the image on the screen and went speechless.

The video's quality was extremely bad. The camera's position was too far for the fine details to be taken down. Furthermore, the beginning and ending of the recording did not match, it could possibly have been damaged in the midst of recording, there was only a few minutes left.

However, that was enough for Origami.

Five years ago. The figure that she saw with her blurred vision. The day before. The figure that she saw with her fading consciousness.

That hated face of her enemy, she was hoping to properly view it for the first time.

Rewinding the video to the beginning and replaying it, pausing it. She enlarged <Efreet>'s face.

And then——Origami's doubts were changed to affirmations.

Five years ago, the spirit of flames that she had been searching for all this time. ——Her, face.

"Itsuka.....Kotori."

A spirit, that was formerly Itsuka Shidou's sister.

Chapter 9: Last Date

22nd June, 9:55 am.

Carrying the bag that contained new swimsuits and towels he bought yesterday, Shidou stood near the Pachi statue in front of the east entrance of Tenguu Station.

That was the name of a bronze statue of a seated dog. It was already pretty famous as a meeting point at Tenguu Station, however it is even more famous as a loyal dog; although its real name is hardly mentioned. The truth is that even Shidou did not know its name as well.

"……Ah—"

Shidou lightly groaned while supporting his head with his hand . Due to yesterday's incident where he lost consciousness, he awoke to find himself in <Fraxinus>'s medical bay.

Although they did basic checks as well as an IV drip, he could still feel some pain in his head.

"Are you alright, Shidou-kun?"

At this moment, Kannazuki's voice rang out from the transmitter. That was to be expected, since Kotori was unable to give the orders, Kannazuki had to take charge.

"Yes……I guess so."

Saying that, Shidou, 'Pa!' 'Pa!', used both hands to slap his cheeks.

Although he was worried about what happened yesterday, but now was not the time to pay attention to that.

No matter what, Shidou has to date Kotori and accomplish his capture of her by today.

Although it is a massive task, but if he were to be unable to accomplish this by today, Kotori's consciousness would be devoured by the power of the spirits. There's no room to be careless here.

"Have you memorized the plan? We will provide assistance from our side. Don't worry, you are the playboy savior who has conquered several spirits. Do show some confidence in yourself."

"……Haa."

Kannazuki's encouragement (?) caused Shidou to smile bitterly. What should he say, it really is a depressing nickname.

At this moment, Reine's monotonous voice sounded out from his transmitter.

"…...It seems like Kotori has reached the surface. She should be arriving at your location soon. I'll leave the rest to you, Shin."

"——Uh, al, alright."

Saying that, Shidou took in deep breaths in order to regulate his breathing.

Not too long later, a small figure walked over from the streets.

Wearing a short sleeved T-shirt decorated with cute frills over a short one piece dress and carrying a bag with her swimsuit in her hand. She had her long hair tied into two bunches with black ribbons.

Although they haven't met for two nights, but he felt that the situation was slightly off. It could be because she was still the Kotori that he knew which was why he could calm down.

"Hey, there, Kotori."

"Nn, I've kept you waiting."

Shidou raised his hand in greeting and Kotori replied whilst nodding her head.

……Following that, was silence.

"……Shin, why are you silent. First of all you should——"

The same time Reine spoke, Kotori let out an exasperated sigh.

"Staying silent after meeting with a girl who put in effort into dressing up? I should have taught you about this already right?"

"……! Ah, aaah——"

That was indeed the case. He had already been taught this during that time when Tohka appeared, but he had forgotten it somehow.

Shidou intended to speak as prompted——when he realized something.

"You dressed…..up?"

"……Uh."

Shidou asked, and Kotori's shoulders jolted slightly.

"Hmph, that's right. It's a formality for dates after all. Furthermore I think that doing so would make Shidou perform better. ……Well, if I were to be praised for it, I won't dislike it……"

"Eh?"

"It's nothing. That aside, the train's arriving soon isn't it?"

Kotori left it as such, and ran to the station before she turned around to face Shidou.

"Well then——let our battle(date) begin."

Saying that, she looked at Shidou's face and smiled.

"Oo……oh."

A familiar phrase. Shidou audibly gulped and nodded.

At that moment.

"Umu!"

"He, hello……"

[Iya—I'm looking forward to this——]

After replying to Kotori, three voices sounded out which got Shidou confused.

Having a bad feeling about this, he turned his head in the direction of the voices——and Shidou's body froze in place.

That's because standing right there was Tohka and Yoshino who looked like they were going on a trip.

"Tohka, Yoshino……and Yoshinon……!? Wh, why are you two here in a place like this?"

"Nu?"

Tohka inclined her head in wonder.

"What are you talking about? Aren't we going to the Ocean Park?"

"Wh——Why do you know about that!?"

"Even if you ask me why……"

Tohka frowned at Shidou's apparent feelings of animosity.

Following that, Yoshino timidly spoke, as though adding on to Tohka's words.

"That's……Reine-san she, said……so we came, um……are we causing trouble……again?"

"……Guh!?"

Shidou held his breath. After which, without even waiting for Shidou to prompt, a voice sounded out from the transmitter.

"……Aah, that's right. It seems like I haven't told you yet. They are tagging along for today's date."

"Wh, what's wrong with this……"

Sweat rolled down Shidou's cheek as he asked. It's true that there was such a thing as group dates, but since they've said that it was a date then they should have went with the conventional two person date instead.

Reine paused for a while before continuing.

"……Well, I was just wondering if the important person of today would mind the date being like this."

"Ha, haa……"

Reine said flatly. Although it doesn't sound like she isn't reflecting on the possibility that she screwed up……but he was still uneasy about this. Shidou lowered his voice and asked.

"However, is that really alright? Kotori's mood is……"

"……Hm, you don't have to worry about it that much."

"Is, is that so……?"

Saying that he snuck a peek at Kotori behind him.

Towards Tohka and company's sudden appearance, Kotori still had the same expression as before, however……

"……"

Shidou's cheeks wordlessly twitched. Upon seeing that there was no change in her expression, Shidou started to relax for an instant but——he soon realized that he had made a wrong judgement.

"……Heeh, you really got guts huh, Shi, dou. I'm really looking forward to this." Kotori's expression remained unchanged, but the atmosphere behind her has changed significantly as she spoke with a smiling face. To put it in the words of a manga, the terrifying sound effects [Gogogogogogo……] would be drawn into the background.

"No, th, that was……"

Shidou voiced out in protest, using his finger to tap the transmitter, he let out a faint sound of protest.

"Isn't this just impossible……! There's a bad vibe in the air somehow……!"

"……Is that so. I thought it wouldn't have become like this……"

"Ho, how's Kotori's feelings and amiability meter now……!?"

Whilst on a date with a spirit, Reine should have a specialized realizer unit to monitor the target's mental state.

"……"

However Reine kept silent for a while,

"……Hm, well, about that, how to put it. ……Good luck."

She said that with an irresponsible tone. ……It seems that the unit had displayed extremely dangerous numbers.

"Ah, hold on, Reine-san……!"

As Shidou shouted with feelings of despair, Kotori quickly walked over to Tohka and Yoshino's side. Patting the backs of the two as she did so.

"Well, we should go then. Have you brought your swimsuits?"

Kotori inquired, the two of them who were dejected due to Shidou's response quickly brightened up.

"Oooh! Of course!"

"The swimsuits, yesterday……Shidou-san had, bought them……"

"Heeh, not bad. ——How thoughtful, Shidou?"

Saying that, Kotori cast her gaze at Shidou's direction. Although her tone and expressions were extremely gentle, it gave him a terrifying chill as though it would freeze his very innards.

"Hyi……"

"Now, let's move along then."

Shidou shuddered, while Kotori led Tohka and Yoshino to the ticketing area.

"Shidou-kun, let's catch up with them first! There's still time to salvage the situation. We will provide assistance at the intended location as well."

"I, I understand……"

Once Kannazuki finished speaking, Shidou forced himself to take a step forward.

……They've barely started, yet Shidou felt that it has now become a date with many obstacles in front of him.

Ocean Park was the theme park located at Eibu Station five stations away from Tenguu Station.

The park was fashioned with various swimming facilities and large bathing areas, built with the thought of having the fairground as the exterior attraction and the pool as the interior attraction. If it was the summer holidays, it would be the perfect place to build familial or love relations.

That being said, it was currently mid-June. Although the indoor facilities and the fairground can be used throughout the year, but due to the fact that the outdoor pool that was the main attraction had to wait till next month before it could be opened, there were a lot less visitors compared to the peak period.

Well, it wasn't like the summer news where waves upon waves of visitors were present, it could be said that it was an excellent chance for a date.

Pondering upon such things, Shidou, who had finished changing, walked out of the changing room and into the indoor pool.

Looks like the girls have not yet finished changing. Shidou inclined his body and stretched, turning his neck as he looked around his surroundings.

"Oooh……this is really amazing."

The area covered by the semi-circular ceiling lay right over the gigantic swimming pool, and at the back, a water slide built like a cliff was placed.

It was a setup that triggers the males' sense of adventurousness.

"It's alright to feel excited, but do remember about the commander alright?"

Kannazuki's words came through the transmitter as though advising him.

"I, I know that. ……Then again this communicator, is it alright if it gets in the water?"

"……Aaah, it is a model that is entirely waterproof. You just have to make sure that it does not fall out from your ear."

Reine was the one who replied to him. As soon as she was done speaking, an energetic voice came from behind Shidou.

"shidou! Sorry we kept you waiting!"

Shidou turned his head around and standing right there were Tohka, Yoshino and Kotori who had finished changing.

What Tohka and Yoshino were wearing were, as Shidou had thought, the swimsuits that Shidou had bought for them yesterday .

Tohka's swimsuit was a light purple bikini, Yoshino's on the other hand was a pink swimsuit that had frills on the waistline area just like a miniskirt. Yoshino did not look like she had gotten used to changing clothes yet. ……Well, Kotori probably had to lend her a hand with that.

It was not known whether the two had gotten used to the swimsuits or it was due to the fact that the visitors around them were wearing similar clothing but they were no longer feeling as embarrassed compared to yesterday. The two of them ran to Shidou's side in small steps.

"……Um, oh."

Shidou lightly raised his hand in reply, letting out a sigh of relief at the same time.

Whether it was Tohka or Yoshino, they were both beautiful girls that could be called [rare] and [one in a million]. In truth, Shidou would probably have forgotten about Kotori and be mesmerized by them if he had not met them before.

"……It was a good thing we did this huh, coach."

As though seeing through Shidou's mind, Reine spoke to him. Shidou frowned slightly.

"……Don't tell me that you already had the intention to do so when you took Tohka and Yoshino there yesterday? And the reason you made me buy those swimsuits is for……"

"……Haa, I'm not too sure."

Reine replied half-heartedly . Shidou made a long sigh.

Tohka on the other hand yelled loudly, not noticing that dejected sigh of his.

"Oooh! This is so amazing! There are actually mountains and rivers inside a building!"

Yoshino who was following behind too was seen in a rare excited mood. She started to speak while slightly flushed and breathed rapidly. [Yoshinon] on her left hand started clapping as well.

"Th, there's water everywhere……!"

[Ha——! I'm getting excited——!]

"shidou, can we go into that lake!?"

"Aaah, of course. Besides that was meant for playing in the first place."

After Shidou answered Tohka's question, her eyes seemed to sparkle as she started exclaiming.

"Right! Let's go Yoshino!"

"Al, alright……!"

The energetic duo ran towards the pool. Shidou stared at their backs——

"They're so full of energy, those two."

The voice from behind made Shidou jump.

"Um, oh, Kotori."

Saying that he turned around. Just as Shidou had expected, standing there was Kotori who had finished changing along with Tohka and Yoshino with her arms folded and a Chupa Chups in her mouth. A white two-piece swimsuit. The top had a stringed design that was tied behind the neck, mildly exuding an erotic feel.

"……"

Speaking of which, he had not seen Kotori in a swimsuit for several years already.

As their parents were not at home, the civilization at the Itsuka residence had significantly devolved. Of course due to the presence of swimming lessons in the summer, he had washed and folded Kotori's school swimsuit before, but he had never seen Kotori's usual swimsuit till now.

Shidou's dazed look made Kotori frown in suspicion.

"What's wrong with you, staring like that. Although in terms of biology, sexual relations between close relatives don't apply here, but there's no cure if you feel aroused from your sister you know? "

"……! It, it's not like that!"

Shidou hastily replied. Kotori on the other hand shrugged her shoulders whilst saying "Aaah, is that so?".

"……What in the world are you doing, Shin?"

At this moment, Reine's voice entered into his right ear.

"Eh?"

"……Haven't I told you already? The other party had spent time and effort into dressing up. You should at least say something right?"

"Ah——"

What she said was indeed true. Shidou coughed lightly, facing Kotori once again.

"Koto, Kotori."

"? What do you want?"

Kotori half-opened her eyes and replied. Shidou was at a loss for words in an instant. ……He had only realized just now that it was extremely embarrassing to compliment someone.

"……Go on."

After some encouragement from Reine, Shidou turned his line of sight away slightly and slightly parted his lips.

"Um, that is……how do I put this, it, it suits you, that swimsuit. It……looks extremely cute, that's how……I think."

He squeezed out those lines with a stuttering that was even worse than Yoshino.

"……"

Kotori's eyes widened and her cheeks reddened slightly. —— However, she quickly shook her head, showing an arrogant smile, she pointed the stick of the lollipop to the sky with her mouth.

"Ara, thanks. That was probably Reine or Kannazuki prompting you to compliment me right?"

"Guh……"

Bull's-eye, Shidou made a groan. However, he would be admitting it if he stayed silent. Shidou had no choice but to continue to speak.

"N, no, they didn't. I'm telling the truth."

Honestly, he felt that Kotori in her swimsuit looked cute from the bottom of his heart. Although he was a little clumsy in saying it out, he was not lying.

Kotori snorted, surprisingly showing a teasing smile.

"Heeh, I'm really flattered. .....Then, where and how exactly am I cute?"

"Huh....., eh, well....."

"......Hm, it's time for us to work now."

At this moment, Reine's voice spoke into his right ear.

In the airspace that was further away, Kannazuki Kyohei, the vice-commander of the airship <Fraxinus> that was currently floating above the Ocean Park, stood near the commander's seat and yelled loudly.

"Now's the time for everyone of us to show our strength!"

Although it was temporary, but Kannazuki had the absolute authority to command the ship at present. It would be alright for him to sit in the commander's seat——however he did not do so.

That seat belongs to Kotori. Since he believes that she would return, he must never dirty that seat. .....To put it simply, instead of saying that he wants to sit in that seat, he would rather be the seat itself.

After that, following Kannazuki's voice, on the main screen that displayed the current situation at the pool, the window showing three options materialized.

"Everything! Kotori looks cute no matter what she wears!" " Although that swimsuit looks rather plain, but it is quite unique. It looks great" "Aaah, those budding breasts are irresistible."

"Everybody, choose!"

As Kannazuki had ordered, the tabulated result swiftly showed on the monitor at his hand.

More than half chose , followed by , on the other hand only had one vote.

"Umu, mostly everyone chose huh. Well, that is to be expected I guess."

Kannazuki used his hand to support his chin as he pondered. Following that, the voices of the crew members below the bridge could be heard.

"Hm, even though it might be old-fashioned, but saying this would probably improve her mood."

"Although is not a bad choice, but it does place too much emphasis on the swimsuit."

"As for ..... Well, it goes without saying right?

"Is that so?"

Kannazuki lightly nodded, moving close to the microphone and said.

"Shidou, choose . 'Aaah, those budding breasts are irresistible.'"

——After one second.

"......EHHHHH!?"

The voices of the crew members of <Fraxinus> as well as Shidou's own wonderfully overlapped with each other.

"Vi, Vice-commander——Are you nuts! The opponent is Commander Itsuka here!?"

"Didn't we say that is already out of the question!"

Below the bridge, voices of disapproval.....or dismay sounded out. However Kannazuki slowly spread both his arms out to stop them, and spoke to them.

"It's exactly because the target is Commander Itsuka.....that's why."

"Eh.....?"

Kannazuki's easygoing tone of speech caused the crew members to lose their aggressiveness. Kannazuki smiled, and pointed his finger to the monitor that had Kotori's image wearing a swimsuit.

"See here everyone. That slender, beautiful, puerile body of hers . That moment in time where a thirteen year old girl is in the second year in middle school.....She's already irresistible. That's all there is to it really."

"In the end isn't it just the Vice-commander's tastes! Saying that would only lead to getting kicked by the commander!?"

The crew's words made Kannazuki widen his eyes.

"Y, you are able to receive a reward from this, isn't this just perfect!"

"That's why we're telling you to....."

The crew members who have long forgotten their formalities grabbed their heads. However at this period, they've long exceeded the time limit. Shidou's slightly impatient voice came through the speakers.

".....Is, is this really okay.....?"

"Yeah, of course. It's fine to change the words from 'breasts' to ' boobs' if you want.[4D 1]"

".....I'll go with the former way of speaking then."

In a bid to stop Shidou, the crew members repeatedly pressed the switch of the microphone, however the commander's seat had the highest priority. Shidou faced Kotori with renewed determination.

"Th, that is.....ah."

Shidou's face twitched, staring at Kotori's chest. Although he felt that it was a crazy choice, but since it was generated by < Fraxinus>'s AI, it should have been approved by the crew beforehand. There must be some special meaning behind this. Relying in his trust in the crew, Shidou spoke.

"Well, those budding breasts are irresistible."

"Wha……!?"

The instant Shidou spoke, Kotori's cheeks dyed crimson and she swiftly used both hands to cover her chest.

"You, what are you saying……! You were actually thinking of such things!?"

"N, no, it's not like that……!"

Shidou hastily waved his hand and an alarm sound went off in his right ear. An ominous sound that he had heard before. It was the emergency alarm that would sound off whenever a spirit's emotions and amity significantly worsens or when their mental state becomes unstable.

"C, calm down Kotori! That was……!"

"……Shin, it's an emergency."

As though trying to interrupt Shidou's explanation, Reine's voice sounded out.

"I know! But first I need to think of a way to get Kotori to calm down——"

"……You're wrong, I'm not talking about this side."

"Eh……?"

"Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa——!?"

At the same time Shidou made a stupid reply, a deafening wail echoed throughout the pool.

"Wh, what's going on!?"

"Shidou, over there!"

Kotori pointed to the centre of the shallow pool.

Over there was the pool that had a part of it turned into an ice rink, as well as the bawling figure of Yoshino.

"……About that, because Yoshinon was washed away by the current, she panicked."

Thirty minutes passed after the mysterious iceberg had appeared in the pool.

Shidou used Kotori's handheld hair dryer to dry [Yoshinon] that was back on Yoshino's left hand, sighing aloud as he did so.

It was fortunate that not much of a commotion was raised over it, and the pool had returned to the bustling atmosphere like before, however Yoshino dejectedly lowered her shoulders. Tohka was curling up in a ball with her.

"I'm, sor……ry, really……"

"Umu……how embarrassing. I was on the scene too and yet……"

"Well, you don't have to mind it that much. There weren't any casualties after all."

Shidou said to the two, Kotori who was standing at one side took over and spoke as well.

"That's right. Everything was the responsibility of our careless Shidou here, you don't need to mind at all."

"……Oi."

Shidou waved the hair dryer, stroking [Yoshinon]'s head.

"That's better, it's about dry now. Are you alright, Yoshinon?"

As Shidou said that, [Yoshinon] shook its body like a dog, placing a hand on its chest as it heaved heavily.

"Iya——Iya——……That was really a great adventure——. I thought I was a goner for sure——"

"Sorry……Yoshinon."

"Ahhh, it's alright it's alright. We're already reunited after all, in the end it's all right Yoshino."

"Mm……"

Yoshino stroked [Yoshinon]'s head, nodding forcefully.

Looking at the scene while Kotori shrugged her shoulders.

"……Well, if we're unclear about the situation then we shouldn't force ourselves. ——I remember that they rent out swimming tubes over there, let's get one shall we?"

"? Swimming tube?"

Tohka tilted her head in suspicion. Kotori said, "Ah——", raising one finger and drawing circles in the air, looking upwards as she did so.

"Well seeing is believing. It's much faster if we go there and have a look. Let's go."

Saying that, Kotori stepped out. Tohka and Yoshino followed behind her.

"Wa, wait for me."

Shidou folded the hair dryer, chasing after the trio. ——Along the way, Kotori suddenly leaned close. As though she did not want to be overheard by Tohka and Yoshino.

"Wh, what's the matter? Is something wrong?"

"……Yeah, um, about just now."

"Just now?"

"……About which part am I cute."

"——!"

Saying that, Shidou felt his heart forcibly contract. He originally thought that he had avoided the issue thanks to Yoshino, however it seems that it wouldn't be that simple. As expected of Black Kotori in Commander Mode. The incarnation of sadism who, once she caught on to the opponent's weakness, would pursue it till he cries in defeat.

"A, about that……"

Shidou tried to dispute that statement with much difficulty, but Kotori continued to speak as though ignoring him.

"That was……just now, they were <Fraxinus>'s instructions weren't they? Or……that was, really Shidou's thoughts?"

"Eh, no, no, that was……"

"……Your real feelings, right?"

As though whispering to the devil inside Shidou's heart, Reine's voice sounded out from his right ear. However……if he replied at such a close range he would undoubtedly be noticed by Kotori. Shidou forced down his thoughts.

"……Since Kotori is more or less aware of our presence, then if you just follow <Ratatoskr>'s instructions all the way, you'd just be reading from a script. Even if you know it deep down in your mind, but your emotions will still have an effect on it somehow. Lies and feelings cannot coexist."

It was just as she said. Shidou grit his teeth, turning to look at Kotori.

"That was……Well, it was really from……the bottom of my heart."

"……"

Saying that, Kotori was speechless.

……Uhu. Although there was no way out but he said it nonetheless. Heartily saying the false truth. Shidou looked to the sky in despair.

——He would undoubtedly be looked down upon. He would be seen as a lust incarnate that would have evil designs on his little sister. He would most probably be seen as a lolicon that loved bodies that were in the midst of puberty. He would definitely be

looked upon as a person who liked ecchi stuff, kneeling on the floor while getting kicked. Even if it did happen to him right now it would not seem unnatural. Such thoughts caused Shidou's brain to short circuit.

However after several seconds, neither the violent punches nor the harsh scoldings came.

Turning back while feeling confused, Kotori lowered her head with a red face for some reason.

"……Hmph. ……Is that so."

Mumbling those words, she used her hands to gently touch her modest breasts that were covered by the swimsuit.

"Kotori?"

"……"

After Shidou called out her name, Kotori's shoulders shook and she gave a hook to Shidou's diaphragm.

"Guoh……!?"

"……Hmph! With just that, death is too good a lesson for you."

Saying that she turned her face, quickly leading Tohka and Yoshino away.

"Nu? What happened to shidou?"

"It looks like……he's in, pain……"

"Hmph, don't pay too much attention to him. It's a relapse of some problem with his diaphragm. Don't get too close. You'll be infected."

Kotori placed her hands on Tohka and Yoshino's shoulders while explaining.

"Th, that girl....."

Shidou held his throbbing stomach, intending to chase after the backs of Kotori and the two. At that moment, a message from < Fraxinus> echoed inside his eardrums.

"......Shin, hold on. There are several <Fraxinus> staff members mixed in the crowd there. Why don't you let them be hit on for a while?"

"You're saying.....to let them be picked up?"

"......That's right, just let it be like in those dramas, when the girls are being held hostage by delinquents, a hero gallantly enters the scene, how's that?"

"Is that alright, this. It somehow feels like I would be beaten up.. ...."

As Shidou said that uneasily, this time it was Kannazuki who replied with a voice full of confidence.

"It's alright. No matter how girls act on the outside, deep down inside they are always hoping for a prince on a white horse. I am well aware of that fact."

"Isn't Kannazuki-san a man?"

"I crossdress from time to time."

"....."

Although it felt like he had just heard some amazing confession, but Shidou pretended to ignore what he had just heard and looked in Kotori's direction. The female trio had already queued up at the counter that had small boats and swimming tubes displayed and it seemed like they were in the midst of filling out the loaning form.

".....Now, the staff members who are in disguise are going to make their move. Shin you have to chase them away bravely."

"Ah, hold on——"

Without waiting for Shidou to finish, Reine's voice vanished. Almost at the same time, three men inched closer to the girls who had finished the process with the loan. Discoloured hair and tanned skin. They looked like delinquents who had nothing to do.

The men smiled and waved, and started a conversation with Kotori and the others.

"Hello——. Hey hey you three, where are you from?"

"Just the three of you? That's a waste."

"If it's okay with you, can you all accompany us?"

And with that they said outdated lines that were used to pick up girls long ago.

"Wh, what do you want."

"....., Um, ah....."

Faced with the arrival of the three men, Tohka frowned in suspicion while Yoshino on the other hand hid behind Tohka. As for Kotori, she was glaring at the men's faces with an icy glare. Which was rare of her to do so.

"Now, Shin. Time for you to enter the scene."

"Ha, haa....."

Reine's voice had just sounded out as one of the three men grabbed Kotori's wrist with a smile on his face.

"Come on. Alright? It's just for a while, I promise you'll be very happy?"

Saying that, he pulled Kotori's arm forcefully. At this moment, another guy was waving in Shidou's direction. It seemed like he's urging him to hurry up and stop them.

"No other way then, let's go."

Shidou patted his diaphragm once more before he took a step forward.

"Um, I'm really sorry for interrupting, but——"

At that moment,

"——Third Executive Officer Awashima Fumio."

Kotori said to the man who grabbed her arm.

"Eh——"

The man's shoulders jolted. However there wasn't a hint of satisfaction on Kotori's face, she continued to scrutinize the other two.

"As well as Third Officer Teshirogi Yoshiharu. Third Officer Kawanishi Takashi. ——Hm those aren't bad disguises at all. You all pass. But your lines suck. Who's the scriptwriter?"

As Kotori spoke with half-closed eyes, sweat poured from the men's faces as they started retreating.

"H, how do you know people of our rank——"

"Rank? What's with that. Since you are in my department in < Ratatoskr>, you are akin to being my family. Would there be any parent who forgets how their child looks like?"

"......!!"

Kotori's words made the men kneel down and cry.

"C, Commander....."

"It's a hot day. Rest for now."

"Yes!"

Kotori waved her hand and the three who had just displayed delinquent behaviour wonderfully made a salute before returning to their original places.

Tohka and Yoshino tilted their heads in wonder.

"Muu. What was that just now?"

"Kotori-san.....amazing."

Kotori lightly shook her head, as though telling them to pay no attention to what has happened.

".....U, um."

Shidou fell into confusion, scratching his face in unease.

He had met with a problem even before he set out to resolve one. However it was logical once he had thought it through. Leaving other Spirits aside, the plan involving the use of < Ratatoskr>'s staff members is totally useless for Kotori's case. Shidou lightly tapped the earpiece, protesting to <Fraxinus>

".....Isn't this totally useless?"

".....And I had prepared staff members who had never made direct contact before, they had special make-up applied as well....."

However Reine ignored Shidou's words and she mumbled softly to herself.

"Th, that is indeed amazing. But what do we do now that the plan involving the staff members is useless?"

".....That's right. I could have been underestimating Kotori."

"Th, then what do we do now——"

"Don't communicate so openly, Shidou."

Suddenly hearing Kotori's voice caused Shidou to jump. Not knowing when, Kotori had appeared in front of his eyes with her hands on her hips.

"Ah, no....."

Whilst incoherent, he turned to face Kotori. He had an expression that looked like he had been discovered while talking to Reine.

"Really now.....it's alright if it was me, but what would you have done if you were caught by other Spirits?"

"Guh....."

Kotori shrugged wordlessly. Although it was frustrating, he could not retort.

However, it's not a solution to remain silent. Shidou shook his head and attempted to change the topic.

"To, Tohka and Yoshino.....Where did they go?"

"Hm."

Kotori curtly replied, using her chin to indicate where. In that direction were the figures of the duo who were wearing the swimming tubes and were already swimming in the pool.

"Oooh, this is great! Look at this shidou! We won't sink!"

"......!.....!"

Tohka let out cries of elation, and Yoshino too was nodding her head in jubilation. It seems that the two of them were enjoying their first time in the pool.

However, today's mission was not them. Kotori, who was the most important person for today, was waving the stick of her lolipop disinterestedly. Now that he thought about it, Kotori seems to have never entered the pool before. It shouldn't be a case where she doesn't know how to swim, but.

"......Shin, no matter what you're going to do, why don't you try asking Kotori first?"

At that moment, Reine's voice sounded out.

On <Ratatoskr>'s screen which had the image of Kotori displayed, a selection window was once again opened.

Let's go and play at the water slide together! Hugging her tightly from behind!

Let's go and rest in the hot springs! It's heartpounding because it's a mixed bath!

Let's float away at the lazy river! Let me be, your exclusive float !

"Hm, well then everyone, choose!"

Kannazuki loudly declared. At the same time the crew members pressed the buttons in their hands.

The screen swiftly displayed the results. had the most votes. Next was . did not receive a single vote.

.....It seems like a result that they had seen before as a dark cloud appeared on each of the staff members' face.

However Kannazuki did not seem to notice at all and he nodded his head relaxedly.

"Hm.....it looks rather apt. Since they have arrived at the Ocean Park, they should take on the rides that it is famous for."

"Although the hot springs are quite popular, that isn't a place that young people should go to."

" is not an option, Vice-Commander, only is a no."

The crew stared at Kannazuki closely. Kannazuki, on the other hand, laughed aloud.

"How horrible. No matter the power of dictatorship, I would never repeat such a brainless act."

Saying that, he put the microphone close to his mouth.

"Shidou-kun, choose . Go the the lazy river, you will be the Commander's float——"

"Hold it!"

At that, two members below the bridge jumped out and forcibly dragged his body away from the microphone.

"Wh, what are you doing, you guys!"

"Analysis Officer Murasame! Do it now!"

As the crew members subdued Kannazuki one after the other, they cried out.

"......Hm? Aaah."

In response to the cries, Reine turned the microphone on after scratching her cheek.

"......Can you hear me. Choose . Go to the water slide with Kotori."

"I understand. ......But, did something happen? It sounds so noisy on your side....."

Kannazuki was still crying out "Shidou-kun! The float! Be the Commander's float! Face-down!" while on the bridge near the Commander's seat, but Reine ignored that for now as she continued.

"You don't have to care. In short, you two must go together alright?"

"Ha, haa....."

Shidou did not seem to understand but he still nodded his head.

Hearing his reply, she turned off the microphone. Upon seeing that, the crew members who were pinning Kannazuki down finally relaxed their hold.

"Really now.....what are you all doing, everyone of you! Such a rare chance! Speaking of which, inflicting violence upon a superior officer, that's a major felony!"

Kannazuki declared, while another staff member spoke with half-closed eyes.

".....In the situation where Medical Officer Rindou makes a medical conclusion of health problems, or two-thirds of the staff with Analysis Officer Murasame included determines that there is a problem with the ability to lead, do you know that we are able to strip you of your ability to command?"

"Uh....."

Kannazuki surveyed the bridge. Everyone was glaring at Kannazuki's direction.

Kannazuki made a fake cough and he continued to speak while cold sweat flowed from his face.

"......Ok, I won't pursue the incident just now, let's continue with the battle plan shall we?"

"Those who think that the Vice-Commander does not have the ability to lead please press the button in your hands——"

"Didn't I say that I won't pursue it already!"

Under Kannazuki's pleas, the punishment was suspended for now.

Receiving the somewhat garbled instructions from <Fraxinus>, Shidou sneaked a peek at Kotori.

"H, hey, Kotori."

"What."

Kotori did not move her gaze as she brusquely replied.

Shidou was at a loss for words.....but he forced himself to continue.

"It.....it's such a rare chance, let's go play for a while."

As Shidou said that, Kotori made eye contact with half-closed eyes as though assessing him.

"Hmph, what do you want to play?"

"Hm, how about the water slide?"

Saying that he pointed to the gigantic mountain that reached to the ceiling. The long slide extended from the summit and occasionally there would be people wearing swimsuits descending from the top whist accompanied with screams and the strong flow of water.

After Kotori glanced at where Shidou had pointed, she turned around and sighed.

"Although it feels a little old fashioned.....Well, I guess we'll give it a try. Right, let's go."

After saying such depressing words, she started to walk towards the water slide. Instead of calling her a girl who was enjoying her date, it might be more fitting to describe her as a commander who was focused on the date.

At this moment, it could be that they have noticed Shidou and Kotori's situation as Tohka and Yoshino who were floating on the water looked over at them.

"shidou, Kotori. Where are you going?"

"Eh? Aaah.....We're going to play at the water slide."

Tohka widened her eyes and tilted her head. Shidou smiled bitterly as he pointed at the mountain once more.

"Aaah, it's that one."

"Oooh.....! There are people coming down!"

Tohka's eyes shone brilliantly and she waded to shore with the swimming tube still on her.

"I want to go to!"

"Eh, eeeh?"

Shidou made a surprised sound. That can't be helped. Since he had finally created an opportunity where he and Kotori could play together and raise her feelings, he had to be faced with a complicated scenario when Tohka came into the picture.

"Nu.....I can't go?"

Tohka probably noticed Shidou's reaction as she dejectedly let her shoulders drop. If she were to grow long ears and a tail, both of them would probably be hanging limply.

Unease naturally settled in his heart. However, if he did not reject her request outright.....

"Shin, you don't have to mind. Just bring Tohka along."

Suddenly, Reine's voice entered his right ear, interrupting Shidou's words.

"Reine-san? Will this be alright?"

"......Aaah. Or should I say that she came at the right time. Probably."

"Eh.....?"

"......Nothing. Well in short, it's no good rejecting Tohka who just wants to play."

"I, I got it."

Reine's words. She must have had some plan up her sleeves. Shidou looked at Tohka once more.

"Nn, I got it. Let's go together, Tohka."

"! Oooh, can I!?"

Tohka's expression changed, immediately brightening up. Although Shidou thought that he heard Kotori clicking her tongue behind him, he was probably mistaken. Shidou continued to speak .

"Ah, aaah. But we need to find a place to put that swimming tube down first."

As Shidou was in the midst of looking around, Yoshino's voice sounded out from the pool.

"Shidou, san. If it's alright with you.....let me hold that.....for you."

"Eh? Really?"

Shidou spoke with a surprised tone. He assumed that Yoshino would want to play on the slide like Tohka.

Probably sensing Shidou's thoughts, Yoshino shook her head with a pale face.

"That's.....too scary. And.....Yoshinon would, get washed away again....."

"Aaah.....is that so?"

Shidou scratched the back of his head and smiled bitterly. It seems that the previous incident has caused a mental trauma.

"That's why.....Yoshinon and I, will.....watch together."

"Really. Then can I trust you with Tohka's swimming tube?"

"Yes.....Leave it to me."

Once Yoshino agreed, Tohka grabbed the tube that was around her stomach, pulling it upwards. But naturally, the swimming tube was blocked by her bust and she found difficulty in removing it.

"Nu, what's with this. I can't get it off."

Saying that, Tohka increased her strength. The swimming tube subsequently reached Tohka's chest, pulling Tohka's swimsuit upwards as well. Her soft breasts could be glimpsed from under the swimming tube. Shidou hastily cried out to stop her.

"Wait, Tohka! Stop stop! You remove it from below!"

"Nu?"

Finally realizing it after being reminded, Tohka pulled the tube downwards. The swimming tube successfully fell to her feet.

"Oooh! You're amazing shidou! How did you know?"

"Gah.....Well, hm."

Shidou mumbled as he scratched his face, Tohka didn't seem to mind as she passed the tube to Yoshino.

"Then I'll leave this in your care, Yoshino."

"Yes."

Yoshino nodded as she took over the swimming tube. Shidou started to walk towards the water slide.

At this point he finally realized that Kotori was hugging her arms with her toes tapping the ground.

"Koto, Kotori....."

"Letting your date partner wait is an NG no matter how you look at it, If this was practice you would have been punished already."

Shidou's shoulders shrank, but Kotori sighed as she slowly moved in the direction of the water slide. Shidou hastily followed behind her.

"Tohka, let's go."

"Yeah!"

After finally climbing the stairs, they arrived at the summit of the cliff. The staff members of the water slide were in the midst of instructing visitors to proceed in an orderly fashion.

It was fortunate that there were not many people playing with the water slide. It would be Shidou's turn soon.

Shidou followed the instructions of the staff, sitting on the water current with his hands grabbing the edge.

".....Shin, I said it before, there's no meaning if you don't go down together."

Reine's voice reminded him through his right ear. Shidou tapped the ear piece to indicate his acknowledgement.

"Um Kotori, let's go together."

"Eh——"

Shidou's suggestion made Kotori widen her eyes.....but she subsequently turned away while coughing.

"It's, it's fine. I'm not a kid anymore."

"Don't say it like that. There's nothing wrong about this. Alright ?"

"Gu.....Didn't I say that it's fine already!"

Kotori hugged her arms once more, turning her face away.

.....This is bad. When Kotori gets into a tantrum, she wouldn't listen to whatever he says.

At this moment.

"What's the matter Kotori, you don't want to play? Then I'll go with shidou then!"

The moment he realized that it was Tohka's voice that sounded out behind him, his back was suddenly assaulted by something soft.

"Toh, Tohka?"

"Mm, then let's go shidou!"

Tohka smiled innocently, pressing herself onto Shidou. Although an additional person would add to the stability when

going down the water slide.....How could he get it across, those two weapons of destruction located on her chest was making him feel troubled.

"? What's wrong shidou, are you not going to play?"

"N, no.....um, how do I put this."

Even he himself could feel his face burning. As Shidou stuttered with a distracted gaze, Tohka leaned her body forward in order to have a better look at Shidou's face. This, however, caused Shidou's back to undergo an assault by two airbags.

".....Muu."

On the other hand, Kotori who was standing on one side was glaring at Shidou. Her deeply furrowed eyebrows. Lips that had formed a へ shape. One doesn't have put in much thought to know . She was definitely infuriated at Shidou who was at a loss at the situation.

However in the next instant, something unexpected happened.

"——Eh?"

Kotori took a step forward, and as though sitting in between Shidou's legs, she sat down before him.

"Kotori?"

"Wh, what. Do you have something to say?"

"No.....nothing....."

Shidou said with a pathetic look, Reine's voice softly spoke into his right ear.

".....Excellent. Nice work, Tohka."

"Eh?"

".....Hm, even though it's a date, I believed that Kotori wouldn't be honest."

"Reine-san, don't tell me, just for that——"

He was just about to speak when he stopped. The reason was simple. Tohka, who had incited Kotori's retaliation, pressed her body even closer.

"Oooh, is Kotori joining as well! Alright, let's go!"

Along with Tohka's words, her sweet breath breezed past his neck, sapping away Shidou's strength. It wasn't just her chest. Stomach, hands, arms, feet, any part of his body that made contact with her soft body, he felt as though his brain would flow out from his ears.

"N, To, Tohka.....Could you move a little....."

"Muu....."

Kotori who had turned her head and witnessed this spectacle was gritting her teeth in frustration for some reason and she changed her position on the unstable water current.

"Oi, hey, Kotori.....?"

Shidou did not manage to finish speaking as Kotori had already turned to face Shidou, tightly hugging his body.

It was as though she was a koala hugging a tree.

It was common for them to hug while they were bathing together before, but he felt unusually excited right now.

"Kotori, you are taking part for real!? Alright then, I guess I have to be serious as well.....!"

Saying that Tohka held the edge of the water slide tightly and the weight of three people was added onto the water current.

"Uwah!?"

"Kya.....!"

Shidou and Kotori let out a wail from the unexpected speed.

In a position that was enough to anger the staff, Tohka was just like a launcher. Even though most of her strength has been sealed, but Tohka's strength was still beyond that of a normal person. She made use of such strength to push them off. Under the terrifying acceleration, Shidou couldn't help but panic.

"U, uwaaaaaaaaah!"

".....! .....!"

"Ahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!"

Tracing a path that almost went out of the slide, the trio left a mix of wails, inaudible screams and laughter as they went down the slide.

However——midway down the slide. The most extreme bend arrived, and the three of them flew out of the slide and were thrown into the air.

"Hyi.....!?"

"....."

"Oooh! We're flying!"

The same time Tohka's excited voice entered his eardrums, Shidou felt the buoyancy that surrounded his body vanish——and just like that they plummeted to the pool at the bottom.

Gigantic waves were made and ripples formed inside the pool.

"——Puha! Ahahaha! shidou! This is really interesting!"

Tohka made a dazzling smile once her face swiftly came out of the water.

However Shidou did not have that energy. His body felt heavy for some unknown reason and he was unable to return to the pool surface.

"Nn.....!"

After exerting strength to steady himself.....Shidou finally realized the cause.

"Eh....., eh....."

Kotori was making soft moans and her shoulders were slightly trembling as she was tightly hugging onto Shidou's body like before.

On a closer look, the two ribbons that she used to tie her hair was missing.

"Kotori.....are you alright?"

"O, Onii-chan....."

Kotori spoke with a blocked nose, raising her head to look at Shidou's face. Her face made Shidou widen his eyes.

"D, don't tell me you're crying——"

"....."

Shidou had just opened his mouth when Kotori hastily released her hands and turned her back to him.

"Ribbon.....ribbon.....!"

"Ribbon?"

Shidou looked around, and noticing the two black ribbons that were floating in the water, he handed them back to Kotori after retrieving them. Kotori swiftly sank into the water once the ribbons were in her hands.

Following that bubbles started appearing on the water surface, several seconds later.

".....Really, that was ridiculous."

Kotori, who had resurfaced, had returned to her perfect Commander mode.

.....However, her nose and eyes were still red.

"....."

"......What is it."

Kotori glared back with half-closed eyes. Shidou stared at those black ribbons as he scratched his face.

He had already noticed it before. The tenth of April. From the start when Shidou first knew about the existence of the Spirits, Commander Kotori appeared.....But which Kotori was the real Kotori, as well as what was the reason which made her develop such contrasting personalities.

The white ribbons were the innocent Kotori. The black ribbons on the other hand was the strong Kotori.

It wasn't dissociative identity disorder, but rather a near perfect adjustment of character——

"......Hey, Kotori. Today, why did you choose the black ribbon?"

Shidou asked Kotori this question.

"What's that, you got something to say about this?"

"No, well.....although it's not entirely unrelated."

Although there was such a thought, he would never say it. Shidou looked around to avoid her gaze. Kotori quietly took a breath before continuing.

"......I can't. The white me, is the weak me. If it wasn't the black, strong me, today would be impossible."

“Eh?”

Not understanding a single word that Kotori had said, Shidou frowned.

"What's that, talking about being weak or strong."

"It's nothing, it's better if you don't know."

"Wh, what's with you....."

As Shidou frowned and said that in annoyance, Kotori looked away.

".....And I thought that the time was right, in the end she's still not honest with herself."

At this moment, such a voice entered his ear.

".....That's right. Let's try it again."

"Try it again.....No. I had enough of the water slide."

".....Hm, you don't have to worry. Just stay quiet and stand there."

"? What, are you talking about....."

Shidou frowned, when suddenly Tohka, who was separated from them in midair, came closer to Shidou and Kotori.

"shidou, Kotori, aren't we going to go again?"

Tohka asked innocently. She probably loved the slide very much.

"No.....I, I think I'll pass."

".....Me too."

Shidou and Kotori shook their heads causing Tohka to pout in dissatisfaction.

"Why? And it was so fun too....."

Midway through her sentence, two girls with swimming tubes swam over. Just as they were moving behind Tohka——

"——Eh?"

It seems that one of the girl had loosened Tohka's costume during the encounter. The top half of Tohka's swimsuit floated to the water. Shidou's eyes shrank to dots.

"....?"

Tohka probably noticed it after a moment. She slowly moved her gaze downwards——

"————!?"

Letting out an inaudible wail, her hands covering her chest, she submerged her head into the water.

"shi, shidou! Di, dididididid you see!?"

"I, I didn't! Nothing at all!"

"R, really!?"

"Really!"

Shidou lied to the best of his ability and as Tohka blew bubbles in the water with a reddened face, she retrieved her swimsuit and retied it while she was still underwater.

Shidou gave a sigh of relief. Although he did catch a glimpse of it, raising a ruckus about it would render his life forfeit.

However, the real threat wasn't from just this.

"......Shidou."

A calm yet rage charged voice from behind him caused Shidou's shoulders to give a jolt.

"Koto, Koto.....ri?"

"......You said you preferred them small."

"Eh——?"

The instant Shidou was bewildered by that unexpected line, that awe-inspiring right punch exploded into Shidou's diaphragm.

"Oga....."

"Hmph, Ogre[4D 2] huh. The strongest in the world."

Kotori shook her right hand as though shaking off the blood on a sword before leaving.

Shidou twisted his body in pain when Reine suddenly spoke up .

"......Muu, did I do something wrong just now?"

"......The ones that swam past Tohka.....those girls.....don't tell me they're <Ratatoskr>'s.....?"

"......No, they would be noticed if they were staff. They were bribed with the angels of money prior to this."

"....."

Shidou let his body float on the water as he felt the hallucination of cupids flying around him.

The time now is 2:10pm. Shidou and the rest were currently at a store within the Ocean Park enjoying a late lunch. On top of the white plastic table that Shidou, Tohka, Yoshino as well as Kotori were seated at, there were large plates of sandwiches and paper cups full of drinks on it. Although it seems like there was too much.....but there shouldn't be any left behind if it is Tohka.

"Umu, it's delicious shidou!"

Tohka consumed the sandwiches hungrily, revealing a beaming smile. A girl who can thoroughly enjoy any food she eats. On the contrary, Yoshino, who was seated opposite her was nodding while taking small bites out of her sandwich.

"It's.....delicious."

"Is, that so.....then that's great."

Looking at the two, Shidou gave a dry smile. It wasn't because of the two. He felt joy upon seeing the two of them eat so happily.

However, there was still the existence of a troublesome issue which caused Shidou to tense up and panic at this heartwarming scene.

The reason for that was simple. That's because seated right opposite Shidou was Kotori who was hugging her arms and sitting with one leg over the other with a bored expression. It was not known whether she was dissatisfied with the meal but her sandwich lay untouched. Furthermore she rarely bit down on the straw of her drink, not speaking most of the time. One does not need to think to know that she was displeased.

".....Muu"

Shidou made an inaudible groan.

It has been more than three hours since they have arrived at the Ocean Park. Although they had attempted to get closer to her via the support of <Ratatoskr>, it didn't seem to be gaining any results .

——Drafting up a strategy before the event, is it truly effective on Kotori compared with the other spirits?

Shidou waved the thought in his heart away. Which one would have been easier. It is true that with an idea of her thought patterns , it may be safer compared to the spirits before. However it was also due to this that the difficulty is exceptionally high. Itsuka Kotori is undoubtedly the strongest enemy thus far.

"Reine-san. How's Kotori's emotional state and affability? "

Shidou lowered his voice and spoke while covering the side of his mouth discreetly, speaking through the earpiece to Reine who was in <Fraxinus>. After several seconds, a troubled voice entered his eardrums.

"......Hm. There's no sign of them decreasing.....but there is also no sign of them increasing. It's obvious once you look at the graph. It has been a flat horizontal line all this time."

Shidou lightly groaned. Although he did think that it wouldn't increase, but he didn't expect that there would be no sign of a decrease either.

It just means that Kotori was indifferent. Was it because < Ratatoskr>'s instructions have been seen through, or was it because the person was her brother?

"....."

In the next few seconds, time was slowly flowing away in silence.

"Shidou-kun, it is unwise to remain silent. You should hurry up and find a topic to talk about."

", ah, aaah.....Yes."

Once Kannazuki reminded him, Shidou's shoulders jumped. As Kannazuki have said. Silence is the worst thing that can happen. Shidou racked his brains for a topic, his eyes looking around.

At this point——Kotori brought her drink to her mouth, after which it seems that she had choked as she repeatedly coughed.

", hack, ugh....."

"Ar, are you alright, Kotori?"

".....Nn, a small amount just got into my windpipe that's all."

Kotori answered as she rose. And just like that she walked away wordlessly.

"Kotori.....? Where are you going?"

"If you ask where a lady is going if she leaves her seat, that would be a death sentence if it wasn't me."

"......I'll remember it."

After Shidou saw Kotori walk off in the direction of the washroom, he heaved a huge sigh of relief and lay flat on the table.

"shidou?"

"Aaah.....Sorry. You two are still eating."

Tohka's curious voice made Shidou raise his head, his stomach growling almost at the same time. It seems that the disappearance of Kotori's presence have caused his high-strung nerves to relax.

Shidou reached his hand out for the sandwich on the plate, swallowing it after a few bites. It was delicious. As expected of a taste that left Tohka and Yoshino satisfied.

"......Hm?"

At that moment, Shidou blinked. That's because Tohka and Yoshino, and even [Yoshinon] were currently staring in Shidou's direction.

"Wh, what is it? Is something wrong?"

"No.....It just feels like shidou is back to normal."

"Eh?"

Shidou widened his eyes in surprise, Yoshino and [Yoshinon] spoke.

"Did you fight.....with, Kotori.....san?"

"You immediately relaxed after Kotori-chan left. You're really readable, Shidou-kun."

"Eh.....Is, is that so?"

As Shidou asked, the two girls nodded without hesitation.

"....."

Shidou scratched his cheek. Although he didn't notice, it seems that it had been pretty obvious.

A date with his sister, attacking her.....and subsequently sealing her powers.

It was already embarrassing enough, even more so if the opponent was that commander of <Ratatoskr>.

The pressure somehow made Shidou overwhelmingly nervous.

"....."

"Uu....."

Under the stares of the two girls and one puppet, Shidou couldn't help but stand up and leave.

"I, I'm heading to the toilet for a while....."

"Ah, shidou!"

Shidou hurriedly left, his back facing Tohka's cries.

It was only after a considerable distance was gained did he dare to breathe a sigh of relief.

".....Really now, so, was I really that nervous?"

Saying that he furiously scratched his head. Shidou felt exceptionally frustrated.

"Reine-san.....the results of Kotori's emotional state, can you let me see them? Please tell me the values if possible....."

He raised his inquiries to the earphone, but for some reason there was no sign of a reply.

"Aaah, Shidou-kun. Although I'm really sorry about this but Analysis Officer Reine has temporarily left."

"Ah, is that so."

Where did she go, though Shidou wanted to ask that question, since he had already been reminded by Kotori before, he swallowed those words down.

"Ah....."

Shidou once again used his hands to mess up his hair.

Since he said he was going to the toilet, then he had better return soon. Although he didn't do anything, he'd better wash his face as proof that he went. Shidou started walking in the direction of the washroom.

Midway——he suddenly stopped as though he had heard something.

"Hm.....?"

The automated vending machines placed in front of the washrooms. Some sounds could be heard from behind.

Shidou pricked his ears and listened. It seemed to be voices that were in a conversation. Although he did not mean to be nosy, —— that voice sounded familiar.

"What's.....?"

Feeling suspicious, he started to walk in that direction. Subsequently, as though attempting to stop Shidou's movements, Kannazuki's voice entered his right ear.

"Shidou-kun, that place is——"

However, it was too late. Shidou had seen what was behind the vending machines before Kannazuki could stop him.

"_____"

Following that, he went speechless.

Behind the vending machines, in that pocket-sized space, even though it was not a distance away from the lively pool, it was still a quiet area that was isolated from noise.

Over there were——two people.

One of them was wearing a bikini and a white overcoat whilst in a squatting position and there was a business bag beside her as well, Reine. And the other person——leaning on the wall while seated, Kotori was holding her head in pain.

Shidou instinctively hid himself.

Seeing his sister in such pain. He should have hurriedly ran up to her——but for some reason, he felt that he should not do that.

".....Are you alright, Kotori?"

"Nn.....I'll get by. But, it's dangerous——I'll leave it to you."

Kotori extended her arm to Reine. However Reine seemed hesitant as she bit down on her lip.

".....I've already given you fifty times the usual dosage. Anymore would have a risk to your life."

"Huhu.....The current me who has become a spirit, mere drugs can't kill me off."

Reine made a bitter expression. However Kotori continued speaking in between her heavy panting.

"......I'm begging you. I want to.....have a date with Shidou, with Onii-chan."

"....."

Hearing those words. Shidou held his breath.

All that nervousness and panic he had felt earlier seemed like a joke as his heartbeat accelerated and rang like an alarm. Thump, thump. Thump, thump. As though crushing it, it hurt a lot.

Swallowing the saliva inside his mouth, his dry throat made a pained sound. Trembling fingertips. Shaking legs.

Even though he was in a room that had its temperature controlled, his body was trembling as though he had been frozen.

He should have known. He should have heard. He should have understood.

Kotori who had totally regained her powers, and the issue of her battling her destructive urges.

Kotori who was the commander, was now locked up in the quarantined zone in the ship under maximum security alone.

Kotori's limit could only last till tonight, this very fact.

——Shidou should have already been informed of all of this.

".....Ah."

He made a sound. Although that volume was not sufficient for Kotori to recognize Shidou's existence——but the mental blow to his own brain was sufficient enough.

He knew. He heard. He had made a decision. That was supposed to be all.

Inside Shidou, he was truly careless.

She was calm as usual, as arrogant as usual, as fearless as usual.

Faced with his sister with black ribbons who bullied him, a sense of false peace had taken root in his heart.

"I——"

Such a strong Kotori, should not be consumed by something like the power of the spirits.

If his conquest fails, there has got to be another way.

Although she did not tell Shidou, she has got to have a second plan up her sleeves.

Even though it was baseless, he had thought it would be true.....!

Regret, embarrassment. His own feelings of regret and embarrassment started to devour Shidou's heart.

Breaking Shidou's train of thought were the pained moans of Kotori. Her two hands held her head and she grit her teeth whilst withstanding her headaches, her whole body trembling slightly.

A while later, Kotori slowly opened her eyes, her gaze returning to Reine.

"——Hey, I'm begging you. This could be, the very last chance. If we fail, today, I won't be myself anymore. ——Before that, I must hold on till the end, and go on my date with Onii-chan."

"....."

Reine hesitated for a while.....before sighing lightly, and at the same time she opened her bag by her side, taking out a syringe from inside.

".....Thanks. I owe you one."

".....No need. However, this is the last one."

Saying that she took Kotori's left arm and pressed the needle in. Several minutes later, Kotori started breathing violently. When her breathing finally returned to normal, her expression looked better as well.

"I'm sorry. .....You've helped me a lot."

Saying that Kotori stood up——before weakly sitting back down.

"......You shouldn't force yourself. Rest for a while."

"It's alright. You should return soon, otherwise that dense Shidou will be in trouble again."

"......No. Wait a moment. I'll go buy some water."

"Alright......I understand"

Reine stood up and started to walk this way. Shidou hastily attempted to escape.....but he made eye contact with Reine.

"......Ah——"

Reine's eyebrow twitched before grabbing Shidou's shoulder, pulling him to another side of the vending machines.

Closing in to Shidou's face, she used a voice that is inaudible to Kotori who is on the other side to ask.

"......Since when did you start listening?"

"No......That, probably, from the beginning."

Reine was speechless. Shidou swallowed before inquiring.

"Reine-san. Why are you in a place like this. Then again with that way of dressing....."

Voicing out his comment about the strange combination of a bikini and a laboratory coat, Reine replied as though it was common sense.

"......Wouldn't a military uniform stand out here?"

"....."

Although he felt that she was standing out already, he decided not to interrupt her.

——Right now, he had other stuff to worry about.

"Reine-san. Kotori.....when did she become like this?"

At Shidou's question, Reine hesitated before replying.

"......From the instant she regained her powers."

Reine's words made Shidou bite on his lip.

It was not as though he did not predict it. However, after being pointed out to him, he couldn't help but panic.

"Then, why?"

"......This was Kotori's wish. She did not wish to tell you."

"____"

Shidou held his breath and pursed his lips. Reine continued to speak as though nothing has happened.

"......To tell you the truth, she did not wish to reveal that she only had today left as well."

"Why.....would she?"

Shidou asked with a trembling voice and Reine sighed before answering.

"......She did not want you to go on a date with her while holding compassion and pity for her."

"_____"

Shidou bit down hard. It seems that his gums have bled as there was a hint of blood mixed in.

"That's why, I beg you. Pretend like you've never seen anything. ——For Kotori's sake."

"....."

"......Shin."

"......I understand."

Shidou breathed out hard, before turning around and returning to the restaurant where Tohka and Yoshino were waiting.

"Oooh, shidou. You're back."

It seems that Tohka was in the midst of eating her sandwich while making slurping sounds on her drink. Shidou sat down wordlessly, observing the two.

"shidou?"

"Is there.....something wrong?"

He nodded to the questioning looks of the two.

"......Hm. Actually we are about to go on a boat tour next."

"W, what is that!?"

"Sitting on a large boat, it is a tour where the boat travels around the pool. Does Yoshino want to come along?"

"Oooh.....Let's! Let's go!"

Tohka waved her arms and cried out. However, she quickly tilted her head to one side.

"Mu.....? shidou, are you not coming?"

"Aaah.....I got, something to do with Kotori....."

"Really? Then I'll go with you then....."

At this moment, Yoshino held Tohka's hand.

"Tohka-san. I want to.....go on the tour. Won't you come with me?"

"Mu?"

"Please.....It can only be Tohka-san."

Yoshino said that, Tohka made a reluctant expression before scratching her cheek.

"It, it can't be helped then.....Then shidou, I'm going with Yoshino on that whatever you call it then."

"Yeah, be careful."

Shidou waved his hand and Tohka and Yoshino waved in reply before heading off in the direction that Shidou had indicated.

Almost at the same time, Yoshino suddenly turned around and said.

".....Please, do your best."

"..... Uu, I took more time than I thought."

Kotori lightly groaned as she spoke and she hurried back to the restaurant with hastened footsteps, taking a shortcut towards their table.

However, when she arrived, Kotori frowned in surprise.

The white table where Kotori had ate lunch was there. However , right now only Shidou was left.

"Shidou?"

Kotori asked, and Shidou slowly turned around.

.....For some reason, it feels that the atmosphere had somehow changed. Before Kotori had left, his actions and speech made her worry, but the current Shidou feels—— That's right, it was just like when he was interacting with her with her white ribbons.

"Those two....."

"Kotori. Get changed, we'll meet at the amusement park."

".....Haa?"

Not understanding Shidou's words, Kotori tilted her head in question.

A few moments later, Kotori sighed.

"Aaah.....Did <Fraxinus> issue new instructions? It's probably because I'm problematic, that's why they've changed to the amusement park huh? Hmph, it's alright——"

However, as Kotori was shrugging.

"No."

Shidou stood up, interrupting Kotori's words. After that he put his fingers into his ear——taking out the earpiece, placing it on the table.

".....Shidou?"

Kotori frowned in response to this unexpected action.

Shidou used an extremely calm voice that was infused with strong will to continue speaking.

"Personally speaking, I prefer the amusement park over the pool".

"Haa.....?"

Kotori frowned even harder whilst pouting at the same time.

"What are you saying, really. What about Tohka and Yoshino? Even if you're targeting me right now, it would be a problem to let the mental states of those two become unstable and cause a backflow of their powers you know? Did you forget about Yoshino already?"

"I've not forgotten. The two of them are currently enjoying the boat tour. Kannazuki-san has been informed as well, he'll keep an eye on them. You don't have to worry."

"......What are you doing?"

Kotori did not have any idea of what Shidou was planning and she asked him with a bitter expression.

Shidou took Kotori's hand, the corner of his mouth rising slightly.

"Playing of course.——This is the long awaited amusement park. How can we not enjoy ourselves thoroughly? We're not stopping until we collapse from exhaustion, be prepared Kotori."

"Ha, haa......?"

And so without any explanation at all, Kotori was dragged off by Shidou.

Chapter 10: Avenger from Five Years Ago

Ryouko, who was wearing her work overalls, stepped into the Tenguu JSDF CR-Unit bunker, gave out a cry of surprise in reaction to the chaos that was forming in it.

"Hold on, what happened in here?"

Speaking to the nearby engineer. He frowned with an expression of utter panic.

"What is it, talk later! At this point of time——C-Captain!"

The engineer hastily made a salute; Ryouko gently shook her head as she continued.

"Dispense with the formalities; tell me what on earth happened."

"Umm.....The <White•Licorice> as well as all of the ammunition has disappeared."

"What did you say!?"

Ryouko's eyes widened, turning to the right.

As the engineer had reported, at the location where the large annihilation military suit <White•Licorice> was placed, only an empty hole was left, AST members as well as engineers were currently walking around in a panic.

"Did someone take it out.....?"

"A-about that.....Even I'm not sure of the exact details."

Ryouko surveyed the situation in the bunker. Despite the fact that they can't get a proper understanding without an investigation, but there doesn't seem to be anything amiss, there were no signs of breaking in or the use of transportation.

This was the key factor, the culprit had moved that massive military equipment without the use of transportation.

Ryouko fell silent for a while, before questioning the engineer.

"——Just now, what was the condition of the emergency activation function?"

"The emergency activation function.....huh? Please hold on for a moment."

Saying that, the engineer started to manipulate the miniature tablet in his hands.

The emergency activation function, refers to the device that is able to temporarily expand one's personal territory as well as instantly don a wiring suit.

If AST members were to use this, they would not need to use a proper suit to obtain a magician's power.

As such, the above mentioned would be managed according to their serial numbers, who withdrew the facility at what time, when

did they activate the equipment, they would all be recorded down within the data bank automatically.

Although that was one of the many possibilities, but it was just a small suspicion that's all.

However——to be able to move such a massive piece of equipment such as the <White•Licorice> without the use of a truck, there's no other possibility other than a magician who has expanded his personal territory.

Praying deep down that she had made a wrong guess, she waited for the engineer's reply.

——However, as soon as the machine gave off a loud beeping sound—the engineer was dumbfounded.

"C-Captain, t-there's one, an AST member had taken it away."

"....., Who?"

Ryouko asked, the engineer replied to her with a trembling voice.

"M-Master Sergeant……Tobiichi Origami"

"All———right! Kotori! What shall we ride next!?"

Shidou who had enjoyed himself on the large vertical jumping machine, held Kotori's hand as he walked forward.

"H-hold on for a moment!"

With her hair dishevelled, Kotori stopped walking as she spoke, preventing Shidou from moving on.

"Hm, what's the matter, Kotori?"

"What do you mean what's the matter.....! Give me a proper explanation, explain!"

Kotori shouted agitatedly.

Well, this did not happen without a reason, since Shidou had just dragged Kotori off to the amusement park and into the nearest thrill ride that he could find without an explanation.

"Explain? I already told you, actually I, Onii-chan loves the amusement park the most."

"That's not an explanation! You dragged me here for just this reason!?"

"You, said 'just this reason' right. Once boys go to highschool, they hardly go to the amusement park you know? They'll feel ashamed even though their family brings them there. It's even more saddening if its just all guys, that's why the only one that can be inside the amusement park, are only those that have girlfriends! Think about it, all those boys that are unable to come to the amusement park, how much do they amount until?"

Shidou dramatically said, Kotori threw him a glare.

"I know already! First of all——" However, she seemed to have noticed something while in mid-speech, her volume suddenly dropped.

"G-girlfriend……"

For some unknown reason she coughed softly, her face slowly turning red.

"Hm? What's the matter Kotori?——Ah, don't tell me…"

"I-it's nothing! Don't——"

"You're afraid of the jumping machine? What's that, you should have told me earlier."

Shidou snickered, Kotori swung her arms with a reddened face.

"Ouch, it hurts, s-stop it."

"Shut up! Take this."

Shidou barely escaped from her assault, pointing to the entrance of the roller coaster.

"Right then, Kotori, let's go on this one next."

"That's why I said listen to me already!"

"Ah, is that so, is Kotori still too short to go on this ride—"

Shidou had just finished speaking with a smirk, Kotori relaunched her assault with a red face.

"Are you an idiot! The height restriction for the roller coaster is just 110 centimetres isn't it! I'm not that short!"

"Ehhh—? But it's really scary you know?"

"Don't underestimate me! You should be more worried about wetting yourself!"

"What's that? Then how about the first person to be scared to be the loser"

"Exactly what I was about to say!"

Kotori nodded whilst panting heavily, entering the ride together with Shidou.

Until Kotori finally realizes that she had been tricked by Shidou, the coaster had already started moving.

"U—mu.....it'll be okay right, Shidou-kun?"

Within the bridge of <Fraxinus> that was floating about Ocean Park, Kannazuki folded his arms with an expression of unease, repeatedly tapping his heel against the floor.

".....No, this might be good for Kotori."

At this moment, Reine who was sitting on the lower deck of the bridge, spoke while calmly staring at the image.

"Is that so?"

".....Yeah. Isn't Shin working hard himself? We could have been worried for nothing."

Reine lightly groaned, Kannazuki still looked uneasy, raising an eyebrow while looking at the monitor.

At this moment, just when Shidou and Kotori had entered the horror mansion, Kannazuki exclaimed aloud in surprise.

The screen showed the two figures who had just walked inside the darkness, only when light from the entrance could not be seen did Shidou extend his hand to Kotori.

"Here, Kotori. Let's hold hands."

"Ha.....Haa? What are you saying again. Don't treat me like a small kid alright? Or what? Don't tell me you are scared, Shidou?"

Saying that she shook her head hard, Shidou would have given up if it was like usual.

However Shidou exaggeratedly nodded his head, contracting his shoulders weakly.

"That's right, I'm really scared to be honest, that's why Kotori, please hold your Onii-chan's hand."

"W-what's wrong with you, how disgusting!"

"Kotori—"

"I-I got it already.....! I got it so shut up!"

Kotori scratched her head, grabbing Shidou's hand after a moment's hesitation. Lowering her head afterwards while showing an embarrassed look, it was really a heartwarming scene. However the crew members still have not discerned the reason for Kannazuki's outburst.

"W-what's the matter, Vice-Commander?"

"Shidou-kun, the horror mansion was such a great moment, why did you have to waste it.....!"

"Eh.....? They did properly hold hands, it looks like there's no problem at all....."

Hearing the reply from the crew below the bridge, Kannazuki shook his head in disagreement.

"What are you saying! Why isn't he hugging the Commandeeeeeer! He could have very well been fully enjoying the Commander's soft body, and there was a chance that his face could be stepped on by that solid heel of her shoe.....!!"

"....."

Sweat started to form on everyone of the crew.

At this moment, Shidou and Kotori had just walked out of the horror mansion, walking in the direction of the bumper cars. The original intention was to sit in separate cars, but after Shidou's motioned with his hand, Kotori blushed furiously, sitting in the large car meant for two people.

"Aa, aaah.....! Shidou-kun, what are you doing.....!"

Looking at the scene, Kannazuki let out a tortured wail once more.

"Why did you have to sit together! Over here you should let the Commander sit alone in the car while you walk! Moving closer to the Commander's car while having a masochistic smile! Slowly reducing the distance between you two! Falling down immediately once your Achilles tendon has been attacked and having your body be baptized by the violent bumper.....! Aaah, Commander! Please have mercy! Have mercy!"

"....."

As Kannazuki was twisting his body while in the middle of his delusions, attracted the stares of the crew once more . Amongst their stares was the unanimous decision that "It was correct of Shidou to throw away his earpiece".

"Hafuu....."

Kotori sighed, letting her body lie on the bench of the central plaza. The time was already past five in the afternoon.

After that Shidou and Kotori went on a rampage throughout the amusement park, in conclusion they went all out in enjoying themselves. It is not surprising for Kotori to feel exhausted.

"Ah—This is bad. I've underestimated the amusement park. That was really fun."

"Hmph, are you a kid? I hope you can stop using diapers before you graduate from highschool."

"I don't wish to hear that from someone who enjoyed herself while on the roller coaster."

"W-what!?"

Kotori shouted in dissatisfaction, regaining herself after letting out a sigh.

"Hmph.....whatever, I'm tired. Furthermore……well, it wasn't boring."

"Nn, is that so?"

Shidou closed his eyes, stretching his body once more, his backbone made a few popping sounds.

"But.....Just how long has it been since we last been to the amusement park. Dad and Mom are usually not at home, it's been around....."

"Five years ago."

"Eh?"

Kotori immediately replied, Shidou let out a voice of disbelief. Kotori seemed like she had realized something..... but quickly continued as though she had no other choice.

"Going to the amusement park as a family, the last time was five years ago. We never came here after that."

"You sure remember it clearly. Really now.....Has it already been five years now."

Shidou repeated that phrase as he scratched his cheek.

Five years ago. It was a phrase that he seemed to be hearing a lot these few days.

The year where the Itsuka family last went to the amusement park. The year that Kotori became a spirit. The year where Shidou had sealed her powers. As well as——the year that Origami's parents passed away.

Shidou wordlessly got up, walking in front of Kotori who was sitting next to him.

——The day before. Shidou had remembered. Five years ago, the conflagration that razed Tenguu City's Nankou-machi. The scene where Kotori was crying in while in her Astral Dress.

For that reason, the one single question continued to exist in Shidou's heart.

And that was——the one who killed Origami's parents, was it really Kotori?

".....What's the matter?"

Kotori tilted her head slightly. Several seconds later, her shoulders trembled as though remembering something.

It was a mystery as to what she was thinking, Kotori's face flushed, her eyes started looking everywhere.

"Eh, that, that.....don't tell me……"

"Kotori."

"Huua, hua hyii.....!"

After Shidou calmly called her name, Kotori made a stupid sounding sound.

"S- Shidou.....? That, um, although the time is almost right..... but, that, a-at least, we should go to somewhere without any people right?"

".....? Why's that?"

"W-why you say....."

Shidou glanced at his surroundings. It was true that one can spot people walking around the area, but they are too far to be within earshot. There's no need to be mindful to that extent.

"There's no need, let's do it here."

".....!"

Shidou said flatly, Kotori's face turned into a deeper shade of red, giving out an inaudible scream.

Shidou who was looking at Kotori's odd behaviour, spoke softly.

"About that, Kotori"

".....! W-what.....?"

"I have something.....to ask you."

"! I-if you want to kiss, you don't have to be so straightforward.. ....eh?"

"Eh?"

Shidou and Kotori looked at each other.

"Eh, eh eh um? Sorry, Kotori, just now——"

"S-shut up! Forget about that! What, you have something to ask ? Spill it!"

"Aa, aaah."

Overwhelmed by Kotori's pressure, Shidou took a step back. Although he was concerned about what Kotori had just said, but he'll let it go since she was so adamant about it.

Shidou cleared his throat, looking straight into Kotori's eyes.

"About that, Kotori. Five years ago, you were——"

——At this point, the instant he spoke. Shidou felt the surrounding noise have dampened slightly.

He noticed it in an instant. Some membrane-like thing was currently expanding in his surroundings.That's right. It was just like, the Personal Territory of the ASTs——

"Eh——?"

Following that, something seemed to have fallen in front of his eyes——the location where Kotori.

In the next instant, a horrifying explosion sounded, the scenery within his vision was enveloped with flames.

"Wha....."

Unable to comprehend what just happened in front of him all of a sudden, his body temporarily froze.

There were no injuries on Shidou at all. The invisible wall expanded in the surroundings had completely blocked off the rapid increase in air pressure.

However, aside from that. The location where Kotori was at, has been entirely eradicated in an instant.

He walked around attempting to find a way to the other side of the wall. But the invisible wall would not give way with Shidou's strength alone.

"Kotori!"

Shidou yelled——Suddenly noticing something.

Such an incident, is definitely unnatural.

Only someone, some person, with hostility, resentment and killing intent would launch such an assault.

Shidou quickly raised his head——Upon sighting the culprit, he held his breath once more.

"Origami!"

That's right, as though surveying the area where Shidou and Kotori were at, floating in the air is, Tobiichi Origami who was wearing a wiring suit and CR-UNIT.

"——Shidou. It's dangerous here. Leave here immediately."

Despite appearing with different equipment each time, the equipment that she was currently outfitted with, was significantly different compared to before.

It was an odd massive piece of equipment that seemed to wrap her entire body. Her back was outfitted with parts consisting of a huge row of magazines, massive swords of light extended out from both her arms, aside from that, there were also two large cannons that one would usually see on warships.

An odd shape as though she was carrying an entire weapon bunker by herself.

——There's no mistake. The one that attacked Kotori, was this girl.

"Uu——waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!?"

After a few seconds, the surrounding visitors seemed to have noticed the abnormality of the situation. Panicked wails started erupting from everywhere, the visitors escaped in a flurry.

That is to be understandable. If Origami had showed up normally, people may have thought that it was just a new attraction in the amusement park, but since she reduced the surroundings to ash with the use of missiles. Escaping is to be expected.

However, Shidou did not move. He did not want to move.

Clenching his fist hard enough to draw blood, he stared angrily at Origami who was still floating in the sky.

"Origami——! You, do you know what you have just done?.....!?"

Shidou yelled distortedly, Origami silently nodded her head.

"——Killing Itsuka Kotori."

Such a simple, straightforward answer, made Shidou shiver. However——

".....Killing, you say. That's really underestimating me."

In front, at the same time a haughty voice came from where Kotori was at, the smoke surrounding the area instantly cleared up as though it was blown away by a twister.——In its centre, was Kotori's figure that was being blocked by a wall of flames.

Kotori softly sighed, snapping her fingers. The wall of flames that surrounded Kotori evaporated in the air. After that, Kotori stared at Origami, raising her chin as though taunting her.

"Tobiichi Origami. I thought you were a smarter person."

".....You know about me?"

"I didn't know that you were such a crazy woman, to be launching missiles when you didn't even raise any alarm nor do any evacuations beforehand."

"....."

Origami glared wordlessly. She probably was giving instructions to the CR-UNIT. Part of the weapon bunker on her back opened, exposing multiple gun barrels.

After which a rain of steel bullets poured down on Kotori.

Due to her Personal Territory, the control of the bullet trajectories was perfect. Of course there were stray rounds that flew near Shidou's direction. However, the invisible wall that expanded around Shidou blocked all of them——Probably, this wall was Origami's doing as well.

".....! Kotori!"

Amongst the deafening roar of gunfire, Shidou cupped his mouth and yelled.

Kotori raised her arm calmly, following her action crimson flames erupted from her feet, swallowing the rounds that Origami had fired.

"Elohim Gibor!"

Kotori spoke, the flames clad themselves around her, burning off whatever is left of her clothing.

And in the next instant, the flames seemed to be taking the place of Kotori's clothing, moulding themselves into a kimono that one can only envision in their memory. Floating robes, burning sleeves as well as——ivory-white horns. The Astral Dress. The absolute armor that defends the Spirit wearing it.

"<Burning Annihilating Demon Camael>!"

Following that, along with Kotori's words, the flames on her hand quickly took on the form of a massive battleaxe.

Origami showed an expression of utter disbelief, Shidou frowned. Tobiichi Origami. A perfect honor student. Always silent and calm, it was rare for her to have any emotional fluctuations.

The current Tobiichi Origami, was glaring at Kotori with an expression full of rage.

"I've found you.....finally.....!" As Origami said that. Immediately after, Shidou's body soundlessly floated up.

"Wha.....!?"

"It's dangerous. Shidou, you better leave."

Origami's eyes twitched. Shidou's body was gently blown off to another area.

"Uwa!?"

His body landing on soft grass, Shidou groaned as he held his head.

He had noticed it. The invisible wall that surrounded Shidou had been dispelled.

However, that was not the main point. Shidou hurriedly got up, looking at where he got thrown from——in the direction of the kimono-wearing Kotori and Origami with her massive military equipment.

"Kotori——Origami.....!"

His most beloved little sister and his friends. The two were people important to Shidou, yet they are opposing each other with weapons that could take each other's life away. Shidou did not think of such a thing unfolding, till now.

"Huu——"

The instant Origami let out a short breath, the weapon container that she was carrying, all opened at once. After that, missiles that were even larger in number than before, traced tracks of smoke as they bore closer to Kotori who was on the ground.

A horrifying sound of explosions and wind, the strong tremors and shockwave rumbled throughout the area.

"Gu....."

Using his hand to cover his face, he squinted his eyes. However that alone was not enough. Shidou had to press his body to the ground, barely able to prevent himself from being blown away.

The missiles have wrought destruction on the land, instantly eradicating a corner of the amusement park. The location where Kotori was at seemed to have been gouged out by a spacequake itself, leaving nothing behind.

Destruction on a horrifying level. Although he had witnessed the AST members and Origami's battles before——but this was the first time he had seen a military equipment that possessed such overwhelming power.

"Kotori!"

Yelling her name. Towards the location where Origami had hit, not a sign of Kotori could be found. Don't tell me, she had been blown away by the attack just now?——

A small voice from above dispelled Shidou's worries.

"Hmph.....That is an uncouth weapon you are using there."

Shidou looked upwards. Right over there, Kotori was floating in the air in one piece.

"Ku——"

Origami showed a troubled expression, turning to face her. Giving the same command once more, she shot the same amount of missiles at Kotori.

And, it did not stop there.

"——Directional Personal Territory•Expand. Coordinates locked (223• 439• 36).....!"

The same time Origami chanted those words, a sphere-like boundary enveloped Kotori and her surroundings

"Hm——?"

Kotori frowned. Shidou immediately understood from his viewpoint. That was similar from the one expanded around Shidou before, but it wasn't to protect her. That's right, it was——

Origami's missiles, passed through the boundary expanded around Kotori, all of them making contact with her.

This time, Shidou did not shield his face. The reason for that was simple, the numerous missiles that exploded within the sphere-like boundary, not a single hint of the explosion was leaked to the outside.

However, it was not hard to imagine what would it be like inside of that boundary. It wasn't just the impact of the missiles, coupled with the numerous shockwaves and wind pressure, not even a Spirit would be unharmed from that.

"Haa..... Haa..... Haa....."

Probably using her brain too much, huge amounts of sweat formed on Origami's face, she panted heavily with trembling shoulders. At the same time the barrier around Kotori dissolved into the atmosphere, the dense smoke inside soon dissipated.

However, with the dissipation of the smoke, Origami widened her eyes in disbelief.

There was a reason for that surprise. The cause of it, was the crimson coloured flames that were floating above the scene of destruction——

"Puha!"

Following that soft breath, Kotori's face emerged with her body still having traces of smoke.

"Not bad after all. That's something I've never seen before. Is it a new model?"

Saying that, Kotori gently waved her hand. As it were before, the flames crawled over Kotori's body, her body and Astral Dress, were all restored to their flawless state.

However——in that instant.

"....., ah——"

Kotori's expression suddenly twisted, she made pained sounds as she pressed her temple with her left hand.

"Ku.....I've, used too much, power....."

Shidou's shoulders jumped. He had seen this before. It was the same scene——as that time on the roof.

The figure of Kotori that was having her rationality consumed by destructive urges.

In a situation of life and death, it was a huge opening.

Origami did not let that chance escape.

"<Cleaveleaf>——Deactivate• Expand!"

As Origami loudly yelled, the blade of the swords of light formed into ribbons and wrapped themselves around <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael> and Kotori.

"Gu....."

"Directional Personal Territory——Expand!"

Origami sang those words once more, the sphere-like boundary reappeared around Kotori.

However, it wasn't missiles that were going to be fired this time . Origami adjusted her body, pointing both cannons of the weapon bunker at Kotori.

"It's over——<Blaster>!"

Following her cry, from close-range, the cannons emitted a blinding flow of magical light.

"————————!"

Reflected in his eyes was an azure light of destruction. Even Shidou who was clueless about military weaponry also understood how much power that light of annihilation possessed. The boundary expanded around Kotori, even though it did not let the explosion of the missiles earlier escape, magical light could be seen leaking slightly this time.

The instant the light made contact with the ground, it triggered a violent explosion, creating a miniature crater.

"Kotori——!"

Shouting at the top of his voice. However, due to the shockwaves generated by the surrounding destruction from the magical light, his voice was unable to reach her.

"....., ..."

Origami lowered her cannon with an expression of weariness. Her face paled, her breathing accelerated. Although it was Origami 's one-sided assault, but it looked like it was her that was suffering.

Suddenly——at that moment, Kotori appeared behind Origami while raising <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael>.

"Wha——"

Origami's face contorted due to shock, she readied her swords in preparation for combat, but she was too late.

"——<Burning Annihilating Demon Camael>"

The blade of flames writhed, lunging itself at Origami.

"Kya....."

Making a pained whine, Origami's body slammed to the ground along with the gigantic equipment.

Kotori coldly looked at the scene, swinging down <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael> gently with one hand. The blade of flames swayed, bearing closer to Origami.

"Ku.....Defensive Personal Territory——Expand!"

Origami grit her teeth as she sang those words, following that the Personal Territory expanded in the surroundings reduced its surface area, becoming a form that sticks closely to Origami's body and equipment.

The next instant, <Burning Annihilating Demon Camael>'s blade slammed onto the surface.

"Ku——aah....."

Origami's Personal Territory seemed to have barely defended against such an attack, but Origami's head seemed to have suffered a large burden because of this. Origami's eyebrows furrowed in pain, letting out a groan.

However, Kotori did not stop her assault. The blade of flames flared repeatedly, she continued to swing her battleaxe at Origami as though it was a whip.

"Ara, where did your arrogance go? Didn't you want to beat me ?? Didn't you want me to repent? Didn't you want to kill? If you do then hurry up and fly. Point your bastard swords and gun barrels at me. If not——Fufu, you will perish."

"......! Kotori!"

Kotori's words, caused Shidou to let out a wail.

That, was obviously not Kotori.

That was not Kotori——but Kotori who had her consciousness consumed with an impulse for destruction.

"Stop it Kotori! If you continue——"

But Kotori had no intention of stopping. The corner of her mouth rose to form a terrifying grin, repeatedly, using the blade of flames to smash Origami's Personal Territory.

"......Kah, ha——"

After that, she finally broke through Origami's Personal Territory after god knows how many hits.
<Burning Annihilating Demon (Camael)>'s blade left faint marks along the metal bunker.

"......What's that. You're done already? How boring."

Kotori coldly said, landing next to the heavily panting Origami. And then,

"<Burning Annihilating Demon (Camael)>——[Cannon (Megiddo)]".

The humongous blade of the battleaxe vanished, the handle changed shape, equipping itself on Kotori's right arm.

And then, Kotori positioned the barrel straight at Origami's face .

"Alright——if you cannot fight, you, are no longer needed."

"Kotori! Stop it! Kotori——!"

Shidou yelled while sprinting towards Kotori and Origami. However almost at the same time, Kotori raised the barrel high, she was already starting to absorb the surrounding flames.

The attack that easily penetrated Kurumi's angel. If one were to get hit from such a close range, it is impossible for humans to withstand it——However, Origami, despite panting with ragged breaths, she was not afraid at all, staring hatefully at Kotori.

"<Efr——eet>.....!"

When Origami said that, Kotori's expression twisted in displeasure.

".....You know such a hateful name. Where did you learn that from?"

However, Origami did not change the way she spoke, she continued.

"Is that how.....you killed them? Five years ago.....you, to my father and mother——!"

"Eh?"

Kotori made a sound that was totally different from before.

"Oooh, look there Yoshino! It's a waterfall!"

Tohka yelled while she was on the large boat, Yoshino who was sitting beside her nodded excitedly as well.

"It's, amazing.....!"

[Not bad at all, I really want to try freezing it.]

[Yoshinon] who was on Yoshino's left hand said jokingly.

In truth the boat tour that they had went on had already ended, but due to Yoshino's insistence, they went on it a second time.

Tohka had originally wanted to find Shidou afterwards, but Yoshino did not let her go, under the naïve thinking of "Since we sat on the left side, let's try the right this time.", they sat on the boat once more.

"Right then, everyone, can you look at here please."

Saying that, the staff member standing at the bow of the ship used her finger to point at the tall volcano.

"That is the largest volcano inside the Ocean Park. Usually it is dormant.....but since it's excited with all the visitors today. Look, it 's going to blow—?"

Almost immediately after the staff spoke. Sounds of an explosion echoed, vibrating the very air itself.

"Oo.....oooh!?"

Tohka grabbed the edges of the boat tightly as she widened her eyes.

"A-amazing! We didn't feel anything like this when we sat on the left side of the boat just now!"

Tohka said——Yoshino for some reason, started turning pale.

"Yoshino?"

"No——that's not right. Just now that was....."

At this moment, an alarm sounded at the pool, an announcement urging people to seek shelter started to play.

"W-what?"

Suddenly——Tohka held her breath.

Although she couldn't explain why, but she had a premonition.

"Yoshino——"

As she turned towards Yoshino, she too had the same expression as Tohka.

There was——a subtle change in spiritual energy.

Further more, there were the sounds of explosions just now. As well as Shidou who was currently missing.

Within Tohka's heart, a sense of dread started to spread.

"shidou.....!"

Tohka yelled loudly, jumping into the water from the boat.

Kotori made a sound while in a daze.

"What did, you say——"

Saying that, she used her left hand to hold her head as though suppressing her headaches.

That voice, that look, it was totally different from before. It was the Kotori that Shidou knew.

Probably noticing it as well, Origami continued to speak.

"Five years ago. Around five years ago. My parents who had lived in Nankou-Machi, were killed by the Spirit of Flame——they were killed by you. You, burned the two to death, in front of my eyes.....! Forget? I will, never forget. That's why I am going to..... kill you. I will kill you! <Efreet>!"

With Origami's increasing fighting spirit, Kotori was blown away.

Rather than saying that Origami's strength increased, it was Kotori who did not resist at all. Unlike a Spirit who wore her Astral Dress, her petite body soared through the air.

"Kotori.....!"

Not responding despite Shidou's calls. Kotori who landed back on the ground merely widened her eyes in a daze, her teeth chattering.

"How, could.....I——"

Origami immediately expanded her Personal Territory once again, regaining her posture, swinging down her massive swords on top of Kotori. The blades of light shot out, binding Kotori tightly.

"This time, I won't let you escape. Directional Personal Territory•Expand!"

The instant Origami made that declaration, Kotori's surroundings were enveloped by a boundary.

It wasn't to protect the target, but to enclose it, a killing cage that was meant for unleashing a lethal attack. Even though she was able to escape before, but it seems impossible for Kotori in her current condition. Sweat formed on Kotori's forehead, she painfully twisted her body.

".....!"

Shidou ran up without thinking. He was unable to do anything. Nothing that he can do will change anything. Coupled with the one fact, Shidou who had lost Kotori's power, was unable to revive if he suffered a fatal wound. Even if he used his body to shield Kotori, a hole would most probably be blown through him.

Despite all this, Shidou did not stop. The reason was simple. His cute little sister was facing imminent danger. Just this, was enough for him as an older brother to rush in to save her.

"Personal Territory condense.....<White•Licorice>, critical activation!"

Origami aimed her cannons at Kotori. However, Shidou did not care as he jumped in between Origami and Kotori, spreading out his arms as though shielding Kotori.

"Origami! Stop! Stop it!"

"——, Shidou. Don't interfere."

"How could I!"

Shidou yelled out loud, Origami clenched her teeth, her gaze turning sharp.

"I should have already told you about it. The reason that I had lived till now was to avenge my parents' deaths. After going through that conflagration five years ago, revenge has become my only reason to live. My life exists solely for this reason alone. To kill <Efreet>, this is my raison d'etre."

"....."

Origami said it as such. A certain girl's words started playing itself inside Shidou's head.

(If I can't defeat her then I'll……)

Doing it as many times to Kurumi——the killing of a Spirit, the girl whose soul had already been worn down, unable to recover. Looking at Origami's current situation, he recalled that worn-out expression as well as the darkness inside those pupils, Shidou swallowed hard.

Why would he think of Mana now.....there was a simple reason for that.

When he looked at the girl carrying large cannons before him, Mana's image had overlapped with what he saw.

"No.....You can't."

Shidou stuttered as he spoke, Origami's eyebrows twitched.

"Don't do it.....You, doing something like murder.....! Pressing the trigger or the like—you definitely, won't be able to come back.....!—"

In that one hit, Origami would become another Mana.

Her soul would be worn down, unable to recover.

It was precisely because Shidou understood those human emotions, that's why he knew. The trigger at Origami's finger, would be the final key.

"I——don't wish to see you, become like that.....!"

However, Origami did not lower her weapon at all, she shot a razor-sharp glare at Shidou, as well as Kotori who was behind him .

"....., even so, I do not care. As long as <Efreet> is annihilated by my own hands.....!"

"Ku——"

Shidou clenched his fist hard. His fingernails digging into his flesh.

At this moment, Shidou had a sudden epiphany.

The Spirit of Flame.<Efreet>. The codename that Origami had used.

"——, ah."

Nearing close to a mere play of words. It can't be helped if one were to say that he was just playing a stupid word game. But, this was just a possibility. This was the final straw that Shidou had left.

"Origami.....Hear me out."

Origami did not reply. However, Shidou took her silence as consent, he continued speaking.

"The one that you're seeking revenge on is <Efreet>.....correct?"

"Yes."

"The one that controls flames that devours everything, reviving from the abyss of death..... the Spirit of Flame right!?"

"Yes."

"Not my sister——Itsuka Kotori, but the Spirit of Flame<Efreet > right!?"

".....What are you talking about?"

Origami's eyebrows furrowed.

"<Efreet> and Itsuka Kotori are the one and the same. What are you exactly——"

"Just answer my question! Your enemy is the Spirit of Flame, not my sister who is human right!?"

Shidou yelled, Origami paused in confusion before replying.

"——Your words are incomprehensible. It is true, that my enemy is the Spirit of Flame. <Efreet>. Not humans. However, Itsuka Kotori is a spirit. This condition naturally falls apart."

Origami silently said. Shidou swallowed hard.

"Move away from there. Shidou."

"No.....I can't. After hearing what you just said, all the more so.....!"

".....Wha?"

Origami was unable to understand Shidou's words as she frowned.

"Please. Just for a moment. Give Kotori and I some time. That way——"

"No. Right now, is the best opportunity to exact my revenge on <Efreet>.....! If you won't back down from there——"

Origami readjusted her cannon's aim. In order to shoot through Shidou, in order to exterminate Kotori.

"Ku——"

It was not that he couldn't understand Origami's feelings. Since Shidou did say something incomprehensible just now.

If someone important to him were to be murdered, hating the culprit was to be expected.

And it was precisely due to that——would one intend to kill the culprit, with their own hands.

If Origami were to kill Kotori in this place, Shidou would most definitely have the same hatred that Origami is currently having towards Kotori right now.

Despite what one says, no matter how one tries to hide it with a blank expression. It has nothing to do with one's own will, somewhere deep down inside, there will be nothing but remnants of cold resentment.

That's what, all this is merely nothing but empty words.

However——even though he can be called a hypocrite, even though that he could be said to be acting on a whim, people might say that he is unreasonable, Shidou did not have any excuse.

"What I'm going to say to you may sound like nonsense, to you whose parents have been killed. If my parents and Kotori were to be killed, I think that I too will bear unthinkable hatred towards their killer. I know that this sounds contradictory! I also know that this is merely a selfish opinion of mine! But I.....! I just can't bear to see my cute little sister be killed in front of my eyes, I also can't bear to watch my friend wallow in self-despair.....!"

"....."

Origami frowned while feeling troubled.

However, Origami shook her head, turning to look at Kotori once more.

"Even so.....I too——!"

Following Origami's words, an invisible wall enclosed Shidou's surroundings.

"! This, is——"

Shidou yelled while frowning, this was the same kind that was erected around Shidou prior before. Meaning to say that it was different from the one holding Kotori, it was a defensive barrier meant to protect its target from any shockwaves.

Understanding Origami's intentions, Shidou cried out loud.

"Stop it, Origami————————————————!""Uwa, aa, aaaaaaaaaaaaaah——!"

Origami seemed to be replacing Shidou's voice with her own, fixing the iron sight of the cannon at Kotori.

But, at that moment.

"——Wishful thinking!"

The voice came from one of the two cannons Origami had raised, the right barrel had been beautifully sliced off.

"......!?"

Origami's face took on the expression of utter shock. However, she seemed to have quickly discerned the identity of the assailant, Origami twisted her mouth in hatred.

"Yatogami Tohka.....!"

That's right. The one who jumped into the sky, slicing Origami's cannon barrel, was Tohka whose swimsuit was covered in a pale purple glow, her hands were holding a huge sword.

"Tohka!"

"Umu. Are you alright? shidou, Kotori."

Tohka landed between Shidou and Origami, speaking while warily keeping an eye on Origami.

Origami's gaze sharpened, expanding the weapon bunker that she was carrying. Even though after launching an attack of that scale, her ammunition did not seem to have run out at all. Numerous missile tips protruded out.

"Don't even try——"

However, before Origami could launch those missiles, a beam of light shot at Origami.

"Ku....."

Origami flew upwards, barely dodging that attack.

At the same time, probably due to the breaking of Origami's concentration, the invisible wall surrounding Shidou disappeared soon after.

At this point, she finally realized it. The laser that was shot at Origami was not what it seemed at all. It instantly froze all the way to the ground with a crackling sound.

"This is....."

Freezing everything upon a single touch, a dense ray of absolute zero. There was an impression of having witnessed such power somewhere before.

"Are you.....alright, Shidou-san, Kotori-san....."

From the direction of the attack's origin, a familiar voice sounded out. Turning to look, he saw a rabbit puppet that was many times smaller than he had seen before.

With a smooth surface with intricate patterns. Jaws with icicle-like teeth. Yoshino was currently riding on its back with her swimsuit glowing faintly.

"Yoshino!"

"Yes."

Shidou called out her name, Yoshino nodded in acknowledgement.

"T-that look.....as well as <Freezing Zadikel Puppet>.....!?"

"That's.....right. After Reine-san told us.....that Shidou-san and Kotori-san were in danger, we immediately rushed over.....the

moment that we thought of helping you two, we just can't stay calm....."

As though taking over from Yoshino——the massive rabbit Angel——<Freezing Zadikel Puppet> roared.

[Phew, that was really close—]

"Gah.....[Yoshinon]?"

<Freezing Zadikel Puppet>'s mouth movements as well as manner of speech, caused Shidou to tilt his head in confusion. Following that, <Freezing Zadikel Puppet> made a grin that was completely opposite to what it used to look like.

[Well, let's leave the thanking for later. But, right now——"

Instantly, numerous missiles aimed at Tohka and Yoshino poured out.

"Ku——!"

"Hyaa.....!"

The two girls gave off cries of pain. Tohka used her sword, Yoshino on the other hand used an ice wall to defend against the cannon strike——but it seems that the two were unable to completely defend themselves against the shockwaves.

Be it Tohka's <Slaughterer Sandalphon> that can slice anything or Yoshino's <Freezing Zadikel Puppet> that is able to intercept anything, they are

probably only at around 10% of their original power. No matter how powerful they were when they were Spirits, dealing with Origami at this state can only be considered foolish.

However, despite Tohka's face was distorted by pain, she still raised her voice and called out to Shidou.

"Shidou! Leave this place to us, hurry up and escape this place!"

"T-Tohka.....Yoshino."

"Alright already, run!"

"We can't hold..... her for, long....."

Origami angrily glared at Tohka and Yoshino.

"....! Stop being a nuisance. I've got no time for you two."

"——Hmph, Kotori and Shidou are the same, they're our benefactors. We won't let you kill her."

".....Right!"

Tohka glared back at Origami, Yoshino nodded her head as well.

Origami exhaled slightly, adding more strength into her swords .

"Well then——I'll just destroy you two as well."

Saying that, she expanded her weapon bunker once more, countless missiles were shot out from within.

".....! Haa!"

Tohka, with a flash of her sword, cut down the missiles that were moving in a straight line—— instantly detonating them. However, that was not enough to completely knock down the numerous missiles.

They dodged Tohka's sword strikes as well as the exploded missiles, inching closer to Tohka.

However, a downpour suddenly descended, freezing the missiles in place before Tohka was hit.

"Yoshino!"

"I've borrowed some water.....from the pool.....!"

Along with Yoshino's voice, <Freezing Puppet> (Zadikel) let out a blinding light.

At the same time, Tohka and Yoshino once again glanced in Shidou's direction. Words were not needed. The two of them had already said it before——Take Kotori, and escape this place.

"Ku——Sorry.....!"

Shidou clenched his teeth, running off while carrying the panting Kotori.

The only thing that Shidou can do right now, is not to care about Tohka and Yoshino, but to leave this place. It is to understand the reason that they're placing their lives on this, in order to leave this place with Kotori——!

"Shi, dou.....!"

Kotori called Shidou's name with a pale face.

"It's alright——I'll think of something.....!"

Shidou spoke as he ran, Kotori seemed at ease as she nodded.

Explosions rang out behind him. Tohka and Yoshino may be used to battle——but despite it being two on one, the two of them are not at full power. Having Origami with a full arsenal of weaponry as an opponent was disadvantageous. It is precisely so, that a worst case scenario of being killed by her exists.

Furthermore, he could not hesitate on Kotori's side no longer. If he continued to let Kotori's consciousness be devoured by her destructive urges, a rampage like before could occur once again.

——That's right, it's not a solution if Shidou merely runs away.

Kotori, Origami, Tohka, Yoshino. There's no meaning, if everyone does not get a happy ending.

And the only method to achieve that——There was only one left in Shidou's hand.

"Alright.....!"

Shidou carried Kotori and hid behind one of the deserted attractions before placing her on the ground. Just by doing that, was able to make Kotori writhe in pain.

"Are you okay, Kotori?"

"Yeah.....Barely, I guess."

Kotori leaned against the wall weakly as she replied.

She's running out of time. Shidou glanced at the exploding plaza before speaking.

"Kotori."

Shidou placed his hand on Kotori's shoulder, at a distance where they could feel each other's breath, he stared at Kotori.

"Ye.....yes?"

Kotori made a stiff, unusual reply.

Shidou swallowed hard. Panic causing his sweat to flow, his throat feeling exceptionally dry.

There was only one method that Shidou had left, the only way to save Kotori. Now is the time——he was finally going to use it.

"Kuha.....!?"

At this moment, the same time Tohka's whines cried out from behind, the sounds of Origami's weapons grew louder.

"I found you.....!"

With that, Origami came closer at a frightening speed.

"——!Ku——"

Shidou held his breath, intending to move closer to Kotori's lips .

However, he noticed that there was a fundamental problem.

Right.....affection.

Because he had thrown away his ear piece midway, the current Shidou had no idea of Kotori's affection for him.

If he was unable to let Kotori's feelings for Shidou increase——then all that he had done till now would go to waste.

If he did not seal Kotori's powers, her mind, would be consumed by the Spirit's power.

Shidou's cute little sister, would be lost forever.

Shidou shook his head as he clenched his teeth——He would not allow it, that sort of thing to happen.

Thus, Shidou moved his face closer as he spoke.

"Kotori!"

Due to the sudden voice, Kotori jumped as she widened her eyes.

However, Shidou continued as though he did not notice at all. He poured out his childish but honest words.

"Kotori. Kotori. You are my cute little sister. You are the cutest little sister that I can ever be proud of in this world! I can't hold it in anymore.....I like you the most! I love you!"

"Hu.....huueh——!?"

Kotori's face flushed crimson, Shidou too made the same expression as Kotori as he continued speaking.

"Kotori.....! Do, you like me?"

"W-what are you talking about all of a sudden——"

And at that moment, in that particular instant, the miniature missile struck the attraction where Shidou and Kotori were hiding, sparks violently sprayed everywhere.

"Aa, aaah.....what a pain!"

Kotori 's eyes swam all around chaotically, yelling out her reply .

"I do! I like you the most too! I love Onii-chan the most! In this entire world!"

"......!"

Upon hearing that——Shidou made his decision, he overlapped his lips with Kotori's own.

A dizzying sensation assaulted his brain. The guilt of kissing his sister whom he had spent years together with filled his lungs, at the same time there was an indescribable feeling of being enraptured by the act.

Following that, Shidou felt something warm enter his body.

It was the same as the other times with Tohka and Yoshino, the same feeling when the power of the spirits had been sealed within his body.

But, at that moment——

"............?"

A few days back, when Kotori's power had moved between the two, the same phenomenon as before.

Hazy memories entered his head, causing Shidou's eyebrows to twitch slightly.

——That day. Kotori was playing alone in a nearby park.

Not playing.....it was somewhat incorrect to use that word. Kotori's mouth was bent in a 'へ' shape of boredom, making creaking noises as she sat on the swing.

Today was Kotori's ninth birthday, however her father and mother were not at home due to work. Her favourite Onii-chan had also disappeared to who knows where.

(Uu....., uh.....)

Her tears started falling drop by drop, Kotori used her sleeve to wipe her eyes.

Kotori cried over the smallest things. Also known as the common crybaby. This had been pointed out to her by her Onii-chan earlier this morning as well, if this continues she could

very well be hated by Onii-chan. No, or maybe Onii-chan does not already like Kotori anymore, that's why he did not come home today.....

Such thoughts kept surfacing in her mind, tears were about to overflow once more, Kotori wiped the corner of her eyes hurriedly.

Even though she knew that this cannot go on. If she did not become stronger, she would be disliked by her Onii-chan.

This however, caused the opposite to happen. The moment she thought of that, tears would not stop forming in her eyes.

(Uh....., ah.....)

At that moment.

【——Hey, why are you crying

Above Kotori's head, such a voice sounded.

(Eh.....?)

Kotori raised her head. An indescribable figure was standing there.

Although she knew that there was someone there, she could not discern what that person looked like.

Although she could tell that it was speaking, but she could not tell what sound did it make.

[Someone], was right there.

Kotori's shoulders trembled. She was told not to talk to strangers, even if she was not told, it would be difficult not to be wary of such an unknown person.

(I-it's alright. Onii-chan is coming home soon)

Kotori wiped her eyes as she said that, she jumped off the swing , walking back towards her house. However,

【Hmph. Your parents, as well as your Onii-chan are not here. You're lonely, even though it was your birthday.

Hearing that, Kotori couldn't help but pause.

(W-why, do you know.....)

That [person] did not reply to her question. Instead, it calmly continued to speak.

【——You can be recognized by your Onii-chan, if you just simply become stronger.

(.....That, is…)

【Hey, don't you want to become stronger? Strength to not let your Onii-chan worry about you any more, do you want it?

(.....)

Kotori fell silent, she felt as though that [Someone] was smiling.

And then, it extended its hand to Kotori.

On top of its palm, a small ruby like object appeared. Giving off a dark glow, it was an incomprehensible object.

(It's beautiful.....)

That [Person] smiled once more in response, it continued.

【If you really want to become stronger, all you have to do is just touch this. With that, you will become stronger than anyone. Your Onii-chan too, will definitely like you who had become stronger.

Kotori gulped.

(Can it.....really let Onii-chan.....like me?)

【Aaah, of course.

[Someone] said. Its words were like an invitation. Just like temptation.

Kotori slowly reached out to touch it——That one touch, set everything in motion.

(.....!?)

Instantly, the crimson jewel melded into Kotori's palm, she felt as though her entire body was in an inferno. At the same time, Kotori's clothes combusted——leaving behind something that looks like a kimono.

(.....! Aa, aaah.....)

The heat that assailed her entire body caused Kotori's face to contort in pain. However——things did not stop just there.

Kotori's surroundings erupted in crimson flames——

(Aa.....aaaaaaaaaaaah——!)

Those flames spread themselves onto the surroundings the same time Kotori let out a cry.

Towards the park. Towards that house. Towards that building. Spreading to the stores next to them

Just as it was intending to consume the entire street that Kotori was at, ruthlessly, violently.

At that moment, a ray of light came from above and struck the ground, that [Person] disappeared in front of Kotori's eyes.

However, the current Kotori did not have strength left to spare to care about that.

The pain of being burned and tortured spread themselves out throughout her entire body. The flames that were swirling around Kotori, poured out as though being shot by a flamethrower.

(Eh.....w-what——this.....)

After the sensation of pain that assaulted her entire body finally calmed down, she looked at her surroundings——The scenery that used to be reflected in Kotori's eyes have been completely razed.

(Aa, aa, ah.....)

Kotori's favourite home, her favourite park, her favourite street, were all burning.

It was evident that this was done by her hand. The flames that had shrouded around Kotori, had razed everything around her to the ground.

(S-stop.....stop it.....!)

Despite her pleas, the strength of the flames did not seem to have decreased. On the other hand it seemed to be ignoring Kotori's intentions as it continued to grow in size. Kotori's face was streaked in tears, huge drops fell from her eyes.

(O.....nii-chan.....! Onii-chan.....!)

(Kotori!)

——At this moment.

A familiar voice entered Kotori's ears.

The voice that Kotori wished to hear the most——The voice of her most beloved Onii-chan.

Turning around, in the location where the flames had turned into a barren land, was Shidou's figure.

(Uu, aa, ah, O-Onii-chan....., Onii-chan, Onii-chan.....!)

Her two hands wiped the tears that stuck to her face, she called out Shidou's name.

However, the instant Shidou intended to get closer to Kotori, the flames that wrapped around Kotori started to swell and bulge.

(.....!)

Kotori froze. At this rate——No. If this continues——

(Onii-chan! Don't come closer————————!!)

(Eh?)

Shidou made a sound.

But it was already too late, Shidou's body was blown away by Kotori's flames.

(Onii-chan.....!)

Kotori was barely able to move her pained legs, running towards Shidou.

Shidou who had landed face-up was in critical condition. An injury extending from his shoulder to his abdomen looked like it had been gouged out from his body, the other areas had been badly burnt. Even a medically inexperienced person such as Kotori knows, that he was in an incurable condition.

(Onii-chan.....Onii-chan! Onii-chan.....)

Not responding despite her calls. Soon after, Shidou's half open eyes slowly closed——

【——Hey, you wish to save him??

At this point in time. The voice that she had heard before, once again appeared above Kotori.

(.....!?)

Raising her head in reflex, indeed, it was the same [Person] as before.

(You.....are——)

Kotori trembled as she looked at that [Person].

(Wh-what did you do to my body!? I.....don't want, this kind of power.....I don't want it!)

Kotori finished, that [Person] silently replied.

【Really? Then, are you fine with watching him die like this??

(.....!)

Her throat finding it difficult to breathe, Kotori shifted her eyes towards Shidou.

(Can.....I save Onii-chan??)

【Yeah.

After that, that [Person] calmly described that "method". In that sort of circumstance, it was truly an unthinkable method bordering on idiocy. However Kotori did not have any other choice.

It was as clear as day that this [Person] was not to be trusted. However if this continues, Shidou will die, that too is the truth.

After Kotori took a small breath, she started to proceed with the "method" that that [Person] had taught her.

Slowly approaching Shidou's face——and using her own lips, she pressed them against Shidou's. Following that,

(————!)

The white kimono that Kotori had been wearing gave off a pale light, slowly vanishing into the air.

At the same time, flames crept up Shidou's body.

But those flames did not burn Shidou.

Wherever the flames crept, the horrible wounds disappeared.

(O.....nii-chan.....)

Soon after that.

(Ah——, ...)

Shidou slowly opened his eyes.

(O, nii-chan, nii-chan.....Onii-chan, Onii-chan.....!)

Kotori did not care about her half-naked state, hugging Shidou tightly.

(.....Kotori. You're, crying again, ?.....)

(But.....But.....)

Saying that, Kotori sniffed.

Shidou forced himself to smile, slowly getting up.

(——Aaah, that's right.....)

Shidou dragged his ragged body, back to where he was at just now.

After picking up the bag he had dropped when he ran towards Kotori, he returned to Kotori's side.

Shidou opened the bag, retrieving a small paper bag that had been carefully wrapped.

(Happy.....Birthday, Kotori.)

(Eh——)

Kotori widened her eyes and mouth in surprise. After all she had been through today she had almost forgotten about it——or she had thought, that Shidou didn't care about Kotori's birthday at all.

Shidou smiled at Kotori's reaction, passing it to her.

Kotori looked at Shidou's face and the packet in surprise, and opening it——Within it, she took out black ribbons, a colour that was more mature than what Kotori usually liked.

(Ribbons——)

Shidou nodded, taking those ribbons, he tied Kotori's hair into two ponytails.

Unfamiliar with it, coupled with the physical condition of having returned from the abyss of death. Kotori's hair was in a mess.

However, for the first time Kotori, showed a faint smile.

Seeing that, Shidou too showed a smile.

(Hm.....As expected, I still like Kotori the most when you are smiling.)

(Really.....?)

(Yeah——That's why. Will you make a promise with Onii-chan ? Firstly.....when you are wearing this. When you wear these ribbons, Kotori will be.....a strong girl.)

(A strong.....girl.)

Kotori stroked her ponytails as she mumbled.

Shidou nodded hard. Kotori used her hand to wipe her eyes, showing a smile even more radiant than before with a reddened nose.

(.....Nn, I understand. Since Onii-chan put it.....that way, I will be a strong girl.)

Even the jewel that that [Person] gave, was unable to make Kotori stronger.

However——the ribbons that Shidou had given her, made Kotori feel that she had become stronger.

(Good.....good girl. Then, let's hurry and——)

At this moment. Just as Shidou held Kotori's with the intention of helping her up.

【——Have you recovered? That's good.

[Someone] had appeared in front of Kotori for the third time.

(Wha.....)

Shidou moved Kotori behind him. Looking at this, [Someone] gently laughed.

【Relax, I won't hurt you two——Or should I say that I'm here to thank the both of you who had brought about the best-case scenario.

(What.....are you saying?)

However [Someone] did not reply Kotori's query, it gently extended its hands to their heads.

(.....!)

Instinctually sensing fear. Shidou intended to escape immediately——but it seemed like he had been nailed to the spot, he was completely unable to move.

[Someone] slowly move its hands closer.

【——However, it is best that you don't know about me. Forget about me, for now.

After that, the instant [Someone]'s hands made contact with their heads——everything darkened.

"Just now was——that……"

Supporting his head with his hand, Shidou frowned.

The exact moment when he kissed Kotori, [Memories] had flowed into his head along with her Spirit's power.

No——accurately speaking, it was different from what he saw a few days ago.

It wasn't Shidou's memories. But memories that Kotori had seen with her own eyes, the memories from five years ago. Those memories have been shared with Shidou through that kiss.

"I remember.....now. At that time.....I was——by [Someone]——"

Kotori spoke as well. At that moment, the robe that wrapped around Kotori turned into particles of light and was blown away by the wind, Kotori's white skin was exposed to the air. At the same time, Kotori lost consciousness.

"_____"

Astral Dress, is the crystallization of a Spirit's powers. If one were to lose her powers, it too would naturally disintegrate. Due

to the same thing happening to Tohka and Yoshino before, although he was prepared that such a thing would happen, but he was still rendered speechless.

Kotori's naked body was enveloped with light before her Astral Dress totally disappeared, she was terrifyingly beautiful.

However, those thoughts were quickly chased away.

A miniature missile was headed straight for Kotori.

"Ku.....!"

Shidou grabbed Kotori, swiftly evading.

".....!"

Instantly, the missile hit the location where Kotori was at before , a horrifying explosive wind assaulted Shidou.

The burning pain spread itself all over his back, Shidou fell over just like that. Kotori seemed to be fine, but Shidou's back seemed to be in an unbearable condition.

"Ah——"

".....! Shidou!"

The one who called out to Shidou was Origami. Origami hurriedly landed next to Shidou.

"Why——Guh, although it's not for medical use, but we have to find some way to treat it first....."

As she spoke, Origami widened her eyes.

That was to be understandable. Since flames have crawled on top of Shidou's body, healing his wounds.

"Aah....."

Shidou placed his hand to his back, after confirming that the skin was there, he got up slowly.

And then, he turned to Origami whose expression was twisted with shock.

"Wha.....Just now that was——"

"——That's right. Origami. Just now you mentioned it before right. Your enemy is the Spirit of Flame <Efreet>, not Itsuka Kotori who was human."

Saying that, he stood up.

"There's no longer any need to kill Kotori anymore. Kotori is..... my little sister, she's just a human.....! You want to kill <Efreet> right? Then——kill me! Right now, I am <Efreet>!"

"Wh, at.....what, is this....."

Origami said while showing a troubled expression.

But that cannot be helped. Since the Spirit's power had unexpectedly been transferred to Shidou.

"However——"

At this moment, Shidou continued to speak. The memories of what he had just recalled. The truth of it all.

"Before you do anything please hear me out——I finally remembered. The incident from five years ago. About what was I doing at that time. About what Kotori did at that time.....!"

"Five years ago....., <Efreet>——to my parents——"

Shidou silently shook his head. "From the moment Kotori received the Spirit's power and till the moment it was sealed, there was someone else present other than me! It is true that the inferno started due to <Efreet>'s power. However, spreading the fire throughout the entire street, was not Kotori's wish at all.....! Don't even talk about Kotori using her two hands to kill humans, it is simply just impossible.....!"

"What are.....you saying....."

Shidou said it bluntly, Origami made a sound in shock.

"That's..... impossible! That person was undoubtedly a Spirit——!"

"Right.....You must have seen it then. But, was that really Kotori?.....?"

Shidou said, Origami's brow furrowed.

".....That, then how are you going to explain this? That day, the one who killed my parents was——"

"There is.....! At that place! Someone made Kotori become a Spirit.....!"

"Wha....."

That's right. There was still someone in Shidou's memories, or should he say that there was a figure of someone inhuman. After he narrated his story to Origami, Origami bit her lip in disbelief.

"You are asking me.....to believe what you just said?"

".....Yeah."

Shidou nodded his head. Shidou did not have any more information left. What's left——is for Origami to believe.

However, Origami brandished her swords of light once more.

".....I'd like to believe that you are telling the truth. But, I—— simply cannot believe you. How can there be the existence of such a Spirit. You are just doing this in a bid to protect <Efreet>, lying in your attempt to protect Itsuka Kotori.....!" However, Shidou could not afford to give up here. Shidou once again knelt on the floor, bowing his head down.

"——I beg you. Please believe in me. If you really won't believe me no matter what, then <Efreet>——you may destroy me. Kotori has nothing to do with this. She is no longer, she's just a normal human now.....!"

"That.....sort of thing is——"

"Origami. You, said it to me before——you do not wish to see anyone with circumstances like you appear again. For that, you joined the AST."

"....., that's....."

Shidou raised his head and looked straight into Origami's eyes.

At that instant——Origami's face contorted with pain, the blades of light gave off a grating sound, the cannons and weapon bunker that she was carrying, fell to the ground as though regaining their original weight.

It seems that the Personal Territory around her has been dispelled. Origami knelt on the ground in pain.

"Ku.....the.....Territory? Why. At a time like this——"

"Origami——" However Origami withdrew a 9mm handgun from the holster on her left leg. Although it was not for anti-Spirit use, just a normal handgun. But despite that, it was still a weapon capable of dealing a lethal wound on Kotori in her current state.

"I beg you.....! Please don't, take Kotori away from me. She saved me. If it weren't for her, I wouldn't even be here today. Please.....! It's fine if you take it as my last wish that I'm ever going to ask! Please——believe in me.....!"

"....."

After several moments, Origami showed hesitation——Before finally collapsing onto the ground.

Epilogue: Encounter of Darkness

The sun set behind the buildings into the valley.

Tokisaki Kurumi sat on the edge of the rooftop of a large building, lazily rolling her head.

Behind her, lay several humans. No——to be exact, the humans in this building, were all in a state of unconsciousness.

With the <City of Devouring Time> the humans in Kurumi's shadow would have their time absorbed, by the wide boundary that Kurumi possessed.

The clock hands in Kurumi's left eye, were moving in the counterclockwise direction with a clicking sound.

This was to replenish the [time] that was unexpectedly used up a few days ago.

Kurumi exhaled slightly. The shadow covering the building slowly retracted to her feet.

Normally absorbing until they died would be the most efficient way, but this many people dying was bound to cause a disturbance. To Kurumi who had not yet fully replenished her [time], she needed to avoid getting found by the AST and that red Spirit.

"......Fu. It's still far, from enough…"

She lightly stretched her limbs, raising her right hand as she said this.

"<Emperor of Time Zafkiel>"

Immediately, a giant clock emerged from Kurumi's shadow. The Roman numerals [I] [II] [III] which had originally disappeared had already been restored. However the [VI] at the bottom, was still white for some reason.

Kurumi raised her hand high up, taking the clock's hour hand an ancient handgun into her hand.

Then, she delicately moved her lips.

"——<The Eighth Bullet Chet>"

Accompanying Kurumi's voice, the clock hands in her left eye moved clockwise at an alarming speed. The shadow that emerged from the Roman numeral [VIII] was sucked into the muzzle of the handgun.

After that Kurumi slowly aimed the muzzle of the handgun now loaded with the shadow at her temple, and unhesitatingly pulled the trigger.

Instantly, Kurumi's head violently shook due to the impact through it, her body splitting into two.

No, the words needed to correctly describe it were a little different. From Kurumi, there emerged another Kurumi… putting it this way would be more fitting.

<Emperor of Time (Zafkiel)>'s <The Eighth Bullet (Chet)>, was a bullet that, when loaded and shot at herself could produce clones from "her past up till now" which would split from her.

The clones' physical limits was scaled with the amount of time that <The Eighth Bullet (Chet)> consumed.

In other words, in order to produce long lasting clones. Kurumi would have to expend large amounts of "time".

"Honestly. It's such a high maintenance spoiled child."

As she complained, she fired <The Eighth Bullet (Chet)> at her temple once more. Immediately, from her body emerged another Kurumi, which got sucked into the shadows encroaching the roof.

A few days ago. On the rooftop of Raizen High School the clones killed by Takamiya Mana and the Spirit of Flame numbered about five hundred.

Although within Kurumi's shadow, there were still a few clones left——she needed to fully replenish her time, to ready her army.

"Next time.....I'll definitely, not go easy on you, Shidou-san."

Her lips curved into a smile, and she snickered. Just then——

"......?"

Kurumi suddenly turned behind. There was nobody——no conscious human on the rooftop at least, even as she sensed someone's presence.

However, she quickly knew who it was. She exhaled, shrugging .

"Aaah, aaah, so it's you."

Kurumi raised her eyebrows, and narrowed her eyes. There, a familiar silhouette stood.

However, an "unknown true form"..... to say that might not be right. The correct words would be that to clearly discern "its" appearance would be very difficult, and the chance of noticing its existence was also very low.

"——How'd it go? With him."

A strange voice that was hard to distinguish sounded, it was of unknown gender, and had an unknown pitch.

It gave a strange feeling. You could understand what it was saying, but you couldn't hear half of what it actually said.

But this wasn't their first encounter. Kurumi nodded with an unsurprised look.

"Nn. It was great. However whether it actually existed, I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes."

That's right. A month ago, when "that thing" appeared in front of Kurumi for the first time, it told her something that she only half-believed at that time.

——The existence of a human with the power of three Spirits sealed inside him, or something along those lines.

But if he really existed.....it would allow Kurumi to take a big step towards achieving her goal. With nothing to lose she tried to get close to him and got a shock. Indeed, Kurumi's keen sense of smell detected a thick scent of Spirit energy from Shidou's body.

"But… have you given up on him?"

"Fufu, how could I?"

She scoffed at "that thing's" words.

"——But right now, I need to prioritize storing up my "time" reserves. My current condition is insufficient to kill the Spirit of Flame. ——However, I haven't given up yet?"

As she pointed <The Eighth (Chet) Bullet> at her head, she continued speaking.

"To use <Emperor (Zafkiel) of Time>'s final bullet — <The Twelfth (Yud Bet) Bullet>, Shidou-san's strength is a something that I must have. I'll definitely, eat him. I'll definitely, not give up."

That's right. She wished to avert that eternity.

The compassion that had allowed this world to go on and torment her heart up until now.

The path to fulfilling that wish, she had finally found it.

Within <Emperor of Time (Zafkiel)>'s letter plates, each contained < bullets> filled with Spirit energy.

They could all demonstrate their powers through consuming Kurumi's "time" but——Only the properties of <The Eleventh Bullet (Yud Aleph)> and <The Twelfth Bullet (Yud Bet)> were somewhat different.

Each use required her to pay a cost equivalent to a Spirit's lifespan.

If she used it, Kurumi might die on the spot.

Even if she survived, she wouldn't have any strength left to complete her objective.

But with Shidou, if she could "consume" three Spirits' worth of energy, Kurumi would then be able to use <The Twelfth Bullet (Yud Bet)> and still have enough to spare.

<Emperor of Time (Zafkiel)>'s <The Twelfth Bullet (Yud Bet)>. Its power was—

"——Reversing time. What do you want to use it for?"

Facing "that thing" that seemed to have read Kurumi's thoughts, Kurumi stared at it and frowned.

"How did you know so much? Let alone show it to others, I've never even talked about it before."

"So.....why?"

"That thing" asked jokingly. Kurumi snorted.

That's right. <The Twelfth Yud Bet Bullet>'s power, was to reverse time. It looked at Kurumi raising the handgun in her left hand, while slowly opening her mouth.

It was a bullet to go back in time.

Telling all the details to "that thing" which had an unknown form would not benefit her. However, her mouth moved by itself. Maybe it was because she wanted to say something that she had never said to anyone before, to someone to say it to.

"——<The Twelfth Yud Bet Bullet>. I want to use it to return to thirty years ago."

"Thirty years ago…? Why that time?"

"That thing" asked. Kurumi put a finger on the trigger, as she continued.

"Thirty years ago, the Spirit that first appeared in this world. The 'First Spirit' became the origin of all the Spirits——my intention, is to kill it."

"....."

"That thing" didn't reply. Not paying any heed, Kurumi continued.

"To erase from this world, the fact of "the Spirit appearing". To cause all the Spirits in this world, to "no longer exist". ——That, is my compassion."

After a brief silence, "that thing" spoke.

"——You, are surprisingly gentle."

"......!"

Kurumi frowned unhappily, aimed the handgun in her hand in front of her and pulled the trigger.

But before the bullet released from the muzzle could hit its target, "that thing" had already disappeared into the darkness.

"How is Kotori's condition Reine-san?"

As he chatted with Reine who was returning to the bridge from the infirmary, Reine nodded.

"Aaah, no need to worry. She'll wake up soon."

"Is that so....."

Shidou heaved a sigh of relief. After that incident Kotori had been quickly retrieved by <Fraxinus>, but seems like there were no abnormalities.

"Then after that, Origami.....what happened to her?"

Shidou whispered worriedly. In the end the other AST members came to detain Origami and bring her back.

".....Nn, well, she did something of that magnitude. Although there were no injuries or deaths. It's almost certain that she'll be discharged, and I'm afraid she'll no longer be allowed to touch the Realizers."

"....."

Shidou couldn't help but gasp. However, there was probably no other choice. Even if she had her reasons, she still revealed a top secret to the public, and put the residents in danger. Even if the AST's main objective was the Spirits, this was an unforgivable thing.

Well, even if Shidou thought about it now it would be futile. In conclusion, he could only wait until Origami's punishment was decided.

Shidou sighed again, and faced Reine.

"Then.....I'll also have to go back. Tohka and Yoshino should be hungry."

As he said that, he pointed towards the ground——the Itsuka house to be exact.

That's right. Tohka and Yoshino who had rushed to Shidou's aid at that time had their powers sealed back into Shidou's body, and after they received some simple examinations at <Fraxinus>, they returned to the Itsuka house to wait for further instructions.

And they had also verified Kotori's safety. It would be time for dinner soon, so he should go back for now.

".....Nn, yeah. They're also worried about Kotori, so go reassure them."

Reine said in a tone gave no objection and nodded slowly.

"Yeah. Then as for Kotori, you'll have to take care of things."

".....Aaah, leave it to me. ——Oh yeah, Shin."

As Shidou was about to leave the bridge, Reine's voice came from behind. Reine then deeply lowered her head.

".....Sorry."

"Eh...?"

Completely unable to understand the sudden situation in front of him, Shidou said in a stricken voice.

"What, how, what happened Reine-san, why did you suddenly....."

"...About today's incident, it was completely due to my misjudgment. I made you worry unnecessarily, and in the end exposed you to danger.....I am really sorry."

"No, how could it....."

It got so solemn suddenly, that he couldn't calm down. Shidou felt something uncomfortable pressing against his body. What could be the misjudgment that she said be——

At this thought, Shidou let out a short "ah".

"Could it be, that it was to let Tohka and Yoshino join in the date? Well.....it was uncomfortable initially but in the end the two of them also helped out a lot....."

As Shidou finished with a wry smile, Reine lifted her face and shook her head.

".....Although that counts too.——But, the misjudgment I'm worried about, was made even earlier."

"Eh?"

The unexpected words led Shidou to open his eyes wide.

"Then what, was the misjudgment?"

As Shidou asked in surprise, Reine slowly walked back to her seat, starting to operate the controls at the platform beside her with seasoned skills.

"To tell the truth, in the first place today's date shouldn't have proceeded. Two days ago——having Shin kiss Kotori right after waking up, would have safely sealed her powers.....However, because Kotori said she was really looking forward to today's date, I was unable to say it out.....Really, I'm very sorry"

"Ha.....? N, no, this would be too unreasonable? I need to raise her affection levels first——"

Yes. Reine and Kotori did say so. To use a kiss to seal a Spirit's powers, he needed to get their affection level to a certain level for it to work.

Just then, the display showed a strange image. An image he saw before. He remembered that it was a graph that showed a curve representing a Spirit's affection level over time.

However, the image there now didn't show the line representing the affection level.

No. He noticed it immediately. The line was straight.

——It ran straight, along the top of the screen frame.

"This is....."

".....Kotori's affection to you, right from the beginning."

Having said that Reine turned the chair in Shidou's direction, pointing to the screen.

".....From the time we started monitoring Kotori two days ago. The affection level during this time has not changed at all. From the beginning it was at the maximum level.....not even one change. "

"Then, then.....that means....."

Reine nodded her head.

".....Didn't she say it in the end? Kotori, she loves her Onii-chan the most."

"Oh....."

Shidou was dumbfounded——

"Uu.....Ugaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Just then, having received a sudden ferocious kick from behind, Shidou fell forward. Like this, his face was buried in Reine's chest.

".....Nn?"

As Reine looked down, she let out a surprised voice. Shidou hurriedly resumed his posture.

"S, sorry for that.....!"

"Nn, again."

After apologizing to Reine he turned back. Kotori who was wearing her uniform over her sick bay clothes was standing there red-faced.

"Kotori!? You're awake――"

"Okay now quickly forget what you just saw! That was definitely an error with the numbers~"

"......There's no such thing. There's also nothing wrong with the system."

"Ten 'La Pucelle' limited edition cream puffs!"

"......Sorry Shin, maybe there's a problem with the calculations."

As Kotori shouted, Reine instantly changed her words as she looked at Shidou.

"......Haah, is it?"

That was a pretty obvious bribe. Shidou scratched his cheek, and faced in Kotori's direction.

"That aside, is your body fine? Shouldn't you sleep for a while more....."

"Hmph, there's no time for breaks. I need to immediately record the information."

"Informations and such.....that kind of thing can be done tomorrow. Just rest well for today."

Kotori glared at him, as she took out the Chupa Chups from her pocket and put it into her mouth. Then she raised the lollipop stick , and continued.

"It wasn't easy to remember it. Five years ago, the incident that granted me Spirit powers. When we wake up tomorrow, our memories might be reset again, so there's a need to make an additional record of it outside of my and Shidou's brains."

".....Is that so."

Shidou frowned as he gently made a fist.

The mysterious Spirit that appeared before Kotori and Shidou five years ago. —Perhaps, that was the Spirit that killed Origami's parents.

Shidou could obviously recall its existence, but its true form was still shrouded in darkness.

"Don't push yourself too hard, Kotori."

"I'll handle this properly."

Kotori waved back as she walked towards the commander's seat. Retrieving a small memory medium from the control point, she then went in the direction of the door she came from. Just then — she stopped while on the way.

"Nnh, Shidou.....What you said before you sealed my powers.....is it true?"

"Before I sealed your powers.....what did I say?"

Shidou searched through his memory, then "aaah" clapped his hands. That was to say before he sealed her powers, what Shidou said to Kotori. —I like you the most, I love you.

Unable to control himself, Shidou nodded his head.

"Of course it's true. I love you, Kotori."

".....!?"

Kotori's shoulders jolted, and in a state of being unable to calm down she kept opening and closing her fingers.

"Eh, ah, that, that.....I, I——"

"As a younger sister!"

"——Is that what you meaaaaaaaaaaaaaant!"

The moment Shidou spoke, Kotori turned her body moving not like someone who had been sleeping just now, and aimed a flying kick towards Shidou's head.

"Uguu.....!?"

Shidou got kicked back into Reine's chest.

"......Nn, morning."

"S, sorry."

Shidou hurriedly got up, and quickly looked in Kotori's direction. Kotori had already turned and walked to the door.

"Kotori!"

"What!"

Rather unhappily, and not even looking back, Kotori spoke.

In an extremely arrogant and strong tone.

In a manner very different from, that crybaby Kotori.

Shidou scratched his head and sighed, and as he moved behind her he said.

"......Those ribbons, really suit you!"

"......!"

Kotori looked back with a surprised expression. Then she and Shidou looked at each other for several moments——

"Nn, thank you, Onii-chan."

She softly said, as she walked out of the bridge.

Afterword

Finally finished Kotori's story. Here I present to you [Date A Live 4 Itsuka Sister]. To all readers do you like this story?

Due to already having done some foreshadowing in the last volume, I can finally show the illustrations of Kotori's Spirit form to the public.

Regarding Kotori's Astral Dress, Angel, codename etc, before we decided on them we experienced many changes, finally deciding on a kimono. The floating feathered garment and sleeves are really beautiful!

Yeah~ Anyway, it looks really sexy. This volume's first color page is by far the sexiest illustration. As expected of Kotori! However, right after that the color page of Origami is even sexier. What a scary girl.

Next, I'd like to announce something to all the readers.

This work [Date A Live]'s manga spin-off [Date AST Like], will begin serialization in the April issue of the monthly magazine [Dragon Age] on March 9.

[Date AST Like] is a spin-off with AST Wizard — Tobiichi Origami as the main character. The illustrator is Oniyazu Kakashi. An illustrator who's great at depicting cute girls, exciting action scenes and attractive underwear. Because of this being a derivative

work, specially designed new characters and equipment will make their appearance, hope that the readers will love it, as much as the main series.

Moreover, the manga adaptation of this series is also scheduled for April, when the monthly [Young Ace] begins serialisation. The illustrator Ringo is an artist of varying styles, and I'm really looking forward to it.

After that, in [Dragon Magazine], Mizuki Maya's work [Date A Origami] 4-koma manga will start serialising. Origami is a really terrifying pervert.

Come to think of it, releasing three different manga adaptations of the same novel at one go, this should be quite the magnificent planning right? And now that I mention it, of these works, two of them star Origami as the main character. Faced with this unusual situation, I can't help but say, "Come on, Shidou! Come on, Tohka!"

The anime adaptation is also in the works, progressing bit by bit . Let's wait and see.

In the next volume - volume 5, two Spirits will make their debut .

Now then, see you next volume.

Tachibana Koushi

Translation Notes and References

Chapter 6:

1. ↑ The furigana in the original text was dragged.
2. ↑ Megiddo is the name for a Hebrew location. It could be referring to Tel Megiddo, an ancient Hebrew city or Har Megiddo, the origin for the word Armageddon.

Chapter 7:

1. ↑ Efreet, or commonly known as Ifrit. They are enormous winged creatures of fire of Arabic origin well known for their strength and cunning as infernal Jinn.
2. ↑ Prajna Paramita Sutra, the Perfection of Transcendent Wisdom. The contents suggests that everything in the world are illusory.

Chapter 9:

1. ↑ The correct Japanese words for these is, 'mune' to 'oppai', both are still making reference to Kotori's chest.
2. ↑ Kotori was making a reference to what Shidou's cries sounded like. Ogre is a large humanoid monster similar to the Japanese Oni. In this case, Kotori was referring to Hanma Baki's father, Hanma Yuujiro, the strongest fighter in the world who was nicknamed the Ogre for his back muscles which made a face of an ogre when flexed.